The MARKED MAN

KARL W. DETZER

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NORTHWESTERN
MICHIGAN
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THE MARKED MAN

THE MARKED MAN

A Romance of the Great Lakes

By

KARL W. DETZER

Author of

TRUE TALES OF THE D. C. I.

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CHAPTER I

THE VIKING'S STORY

Gustaf Erickson sat in the clean whitewashed kitchen of his house on Madrid beach and watched his son Norman disapprovingly. It was a small kitchen, heavily beamed overhead, its walls lined with cupboards which Gustaf called lockers; a plain, bare, easy room, except for an obtrusive neatness. Gustaf usually felt comfortable in his kitchen, though his wife had not. He had built it himself. It was exactly such a room as an old seaman might be expected to build when at length he drags his dunnage ashore to waste his later years on the monotonous security of solid earth.

Gustaf's small blinking eyes moved restlessly from beam to locker to panel, fixing themselves nowhere, returning each time to the tall lean figure of his son. The boy was stuffing a pickerel for their dinner. Over his old dungarees, faded and scraped thin at knees and elbows, he wore a woman's blue apron. It was too short for him by a dozen inches, and the strings barely met behind. Gustaf observed it, scowling. It was his wife's apron. She had been dead six days.

Norman deftly bent the slim body of the pickerel to fit the square baking dish, put away the needle with which he had sewed the gash in its silvery bottom and

slid the pan into the oven. As he opened the iron door heat slapped out into the room. Sweat rose on his forehead at the edge of his straight blond hair. He walked to a narrow shelf under the window and poured two dippers of water into a tin basin.

His father regarded him critically. Norman's hands, lathering the soap, flashing quickly through the water, distressed old Gustaf. They were too slender. The fingers were too thin and too long. Their suppleness irritated the old man, just as the comfortable way Norman wore the apron irritated him. Somehow the hands and the apron suggested the land, and the womanish ways of landsmen.

A salty anger arose in Gustaf Erickson, anger at his son, at youth, at the passive and secure content of all men who did not thirst for the sea.

"How long yet you goin' to work on that wagon job?" he asked. His voice had a windy flavor, as if it had been tuned and broken against the resonant chorus of mighty storms. It was a wet voice, with the dripping consonants of old north country seafarers.

Norman took his serious blond face from the roller towel. He looked at his father a moment before he answered. His blue eyes, with pink lids that suggested he might have wept recently, did not focus immediately upon the old man.

"I figured on going back to-morrow," he said at length. "Hans gave me as long off as I needed. I was staying at home on account of things here. . . ."

"That ain't what I'm asking. How long yet you going to waste time driving around on a wagon?"

"Long as they'll need me. Middle of October, whenever summer trade's done. Two months more, anyway. . . ."

Gustaf tapped the arm of his chair with the short, knotted, once capable fingers of his broad right hand.

His eyes, which had a habit of widening or screwing shut according to the heat of his temper, regarded his son with emphatic disapproval.

"Tell 'em you're quitting," he said. He spoke slowly. He pronounced his words firmly as he always did when there was malice in him. "You've rode around enough on land. I'm takin' you partners."

"In the boat?" Norman asked. Gustaf thought that he winced.

"Sure, in the boat. To-morrow."

Norman turned without comment to the window. He knew that argument was futile. He could no more dispute the verdict of his father than he could stop the rush of water in Lake Michigan. He could see the lake through the kitchen window, rumbling up its beaches across the white and yellow dunes. Shoreward it tramped in blue successive rollers, shouting a gusty challenge to him, the same taunting unmet challenge it had roared in his ears since the stormy night that he was born. It was on a rampage to-day, chewing the sand, biting deep into the defenseless earth, insolent in its defiance. Its roar had laughter in it, and a grim recklessness. Its voice to-day was the voice of old Gustaf Erickson, windy and resonant, wet with dripping consonants.

Norman stared out at the lake rebelliously, conscious of his father's eyes boring hard at his back. He did not wish to fish. Since the first day he could remember, another day of storm and disaster on the coast, that vast heaving water had mocked him. It had combatted him. It had taunted him and dared him to hate it.

And he could not hate it. His resentment against deep water was cooled often by another sensation, a strange tugging at his heart, particularly on quiet days when it rolled with a slow oily tempo. If the lake were kin to old Gustaf it must be kin to him. His father

loved it more than he did wife or child, more than life itself. Whole-souled, old Gustaf offered the disdainful waters a passionate and flaming devotion. His brittle heart softened when he thought of those wet, unresponsive wastes. Their buffets only endeared them to him, their repulses stimulated his hot desire, their austere resistance stirred him to new unreasoning attempts to conquer.

Norman understood this in his father. Old Gustaf played the part of passionate lover to Lake Michigan. His little black-eyed mother had known that. Certainly she had not loved such a rival. She had not belonged here on the beach in the wind and spray. She had died yearning for a farm. A dozen times in these six days Norman had blamed the cold compassionless waters for her hard life, her lonely death.

"It's time you learn to fish," Gustaf growled. "Been enough wearin' of aprons and spadin' round on land and drivin' folks' wagons for any boy o' mine! I'll make a man o' you now."

He arose jerkily from his chair and crossed to the door. His back was bent, just as his arms were and his legs. He once had been taller than his son was now. Age had shrunk him, pinching his flesh and bones. Only his knuckles, the joints of his knees and elbows, retained the ponderous proportions of his youth. He slammed the door behind him and sat down sullenly upon the step. He was ashamed of his son.

His wife, he told himself, had been to blame. Letting a grown boy, his son, an Erickson, drift around on shore, drive a delivery wagon for a living, dig potatoes like a Frenchie from the hills.

"I'll learn him to sail," he grumbled, "learn him now!"

His shoulders were hunched as he sat on the kitchen step. His attitude gave him, somehow, the appearance

of great strength. He knew what the people in Madrid Bay thought of him. They believed him worn out. He had sensed that, the way they pitied him the day of his wife's funeral. They were mistaken. He wasn't worn out. He could still conquer his son. The strength was there, hidden deep down in his body that was wasting under the heartless inroads of the years. His tired old hands were capable still of immense feats of lifting, short bursts of terrifying toil. His big fists were hard. He held them locked now, over his big knees. His lean head bent forward. It was bald on top, with frayed gray hair in a ring, like the head of a monk.

"Him an Erickson!" he grumbled. "A grown boy, and still ashore!"

Gustaf's nose, which was large and solid as a chunk of hard wood, sniffed at the moist lake air. It smelled like rain. To-morrow, he had said, he would take out the boat. Would he have to beat his son into the fishing fleet? He knew Norman did not want to fish. The whole village knew it. What matter that? He *would* fish. He would go out in the early dripping mornings like a dutiful son, out to the fishing banks; he would pit himself against water and wind, would heave on pond net and gill net, or, straddling the tiller, guide the boat safely home as an Erickson should.

Gustaf knew the duties of an Erickson. An Erickson went to sea. On salt, in the old days. But he wouldn't insist on that for Norman. He'd be satisfied with the lakes.

Gustaf Erickson had sailed aboard old square riggers in the days of his blond inquisitive youth. He had felt the sleet of the Cape and the Horn on his face. He had sweat himself into fever in the Sargossa Sea and then, because of fabulous tales of a dollar a day with the Great Lakes lumber fleets, he had left salt water behind him, and never regretted it. A man could

domineer labor on the lakes. Half-breed crews had learned his strength from the Upper Peninsula to Chicago, from the Soo to Erie ports. He rose in five years from second mate to master of a pot-bellied, overworked shingle schooner, commanded her for three boisterous seasons, and one night, alone, swam ashore from her heart-breaking wreck on Mustache shoal.

His terrified crew had taken the boat ten hours before. Lashed to his wheel, Gustaf Erickson, stubborn, pitiless, unafraid, an unthinking mariner who upheld the dignity of the old sea, who bullied men and canvas, who offered no mercy, begged no quarter, who exalted in big odds and abhorred a whine, watched his craft sink lower and lower, and boiling waves swarm over her decks. In the morning, the morning of his thirty-eighth birthday, groping a spar, he was tossed ashore and crawled, beaten, up a flat sandy beach.

He had lived a long, long life.

A French Canadian farmer found him and took him home. Three months later Gustaf married the farmer's daughter. Why not? She was young, meek, womanly and available. By Gustaf's choice they named their son Norman.

"If it's a girl," he had said, "call her *Aleece*, or *Ami*, or any of the French names you want. If he's a boy, he's a sailor, like me and my father and my grandpaw. I'll call him Norman, after my grandpaw."

By the same bewildering odds that had broken up Gustaf's schooner and cast him safely to land, his son Norman had declined to put to sea. Hunched over on the back step, awaiting the fish that Norman baked, Gustaf Erickson thought of the five fretful years he had tilled miserly soil. His jaw, that had been solid as spikes, had grown less rigid those dusty years. He had wasted many good plowing hours staring across dunes at the beckoning lake. Then one morning, while his

wife cried out bitterly that he did not love her, that he never had loved her, he sailed away to the fishing banks. He had no crew to bully. Alone, reckless, early seasons and late, he drove the boat that his own hands had built, setting and lifting nets, matching his temper against wind and weather, always making good catches of fish.

He moved his wife without ceremony from the farm to the house on the beach. She was past all remonstrance then. And each winter thereafter, while ice spread over the water, Gustaf Erickson sat by the stove, night after night, in this same whitewashed kitchen, and told monstrous tales of the five fresh lakes and the seven salty seas. His black-eyed wife, and his son who was blond as he, shivered those nights when he talked. Their manner angered Gustaf. Why should they fear the true stories he told, stories out of his own reckless past? Tales of riot and starvation they were, of mutiny, brutality, great storms, heroism, despair. He had mastered all these difficulties. Hadn't he sailed on the schooner *Gottland?*

Only once, in the years that Norman's mother kept his house, did Gustaf strike her; that night she had protested when he flogged their son. He got out a piece of half-inch rope because the boy had sniveled like a baby over Gustaf's favorite story of the captain's wife and dog.

"It was a good dog," old Gustaf had said, "a big dog, strong, hairy all over. His name was Nels. We liked that dog. The schooner . . . ah, the *Gottland,* she was a fine strong schooner, a five master! Nobody ever jump ship off her, I tell you. Till that captain's wife come aboard for a voyage. Why you think that woman come anyway?"

Old Gustaf scowled.

"We hate her, us on schooner. She never give no-

body enough to eat, not even her old man. Always skimp, skimp! The cook . . . what could the cook do at such stinginess except swear? She was punished for it! It blows three days down off Newfoundland. Blow? How can I tell it! The third night . . . by Mackinac, we all was glad when it gets dark that night so we don't have to look no more at the waves! I was at the wheel. The captain, I know not where that captain was. He was all over. He was a good sailor. But his woman, she sit with the dog in the cabin. Jupiter, was she scared! We'd of been glad she feel bad, all of us on schooner, if we was not so scared ourselves. And then that big wave come along, two, three times big as all the rest. The biggest wave in the world. It smashed in the cabin skylight, tore right through the tarpaulins . . . push, right in! It took out all the bulkhead on the port side. The ocean does not love the captain's wife. A big, big hole!

"I see something float past when I have wiped the salt from out my eyes. Two somethings, out that skylight. I hollered. Hollered loud. The captain came. It was all awash in the cabin. Dark. He found no dog. No wife.

"It was a good dog. We feel sorry that dog was lost. But the woman? She give nobody enough to eat!

"The *Gottland*, me, nobody else ever see such a storm. We was from Halifax for Rouen that trip, with a cargo of leather. Twenty-eight days out we sailed into Havre, and a little tug with paddle wheels towed us up the river, and on that left side there was green fields and on the right side there was green trees, and everything was peaceful, so peaceful us on schooner could not believe it. Only that captain, he still felt bad over his dog and that woman . . . it was a good dog."

Gustaf would light his pipe at this point, puffing contemplatively over the merciless justice of the sea.

Many nights he repeated the tale in his grim weary singsong. The lake wept on its beaches, and his son Norman, fleeing white-faced to bed, lay awake under the hand-hewn shingles, hour after pitiless hour, with terror sitting atop the flannel covers, pressing the breath out of his lungs, tormenting sleep from the room.

"I'll make that boy a sailor yet!" he heard old Gustaf storm to his mother. "Why should an Erickson act so?"

Gustaf never forgot that night's scene, any more than Norman did. The sympathy that grew up between his faithful, harassed little wife and his son seemed unfair to him. He watched it suspiciously. He assigned all his failures with Norman to her, attributed contemptuously to back-hills French blood the sensitive spots in his son's pliant adolescent mind. To be sure he regretted his wife's abrupt removal from his life. It was a shock to discover one morning that she had gone to bed quietly and died. He stayed ashore all week from the fishing banks, watching his son wear the faded blue apron.

Norman cleaned the house carefully after the funeral. He had only one memorable picture of his mother. From habit it must be in the kitchen. He saw her, waiting, always in an apron, for his father's boat to come ashore. He put on the apron without distaste when necessity drove him to do her work. It did not occur to him that it might be a soft womanish symbol to his father.

"You been layin' around land long enough," Gustaf grumbled that noon when he finished the pickerel and potatoes. "Near twenty years old, and where you ever sailed? Madrid Bay! That's fine sailin' for a grown man, now ain't it? I was twice around the Horn when I was twenty. My paw and my grandpaw didn't die ashore. Why I name you Norman?"

He kicked his chair back from the table. Norman arose. It was apparent as they stood side by side how much taller he was now than his father. He was thinner, his back still was straight. In his pink Erickson face, there showed clean untested lines.

"I'm going out," Norman said. He nodded indefinitely in the direction of town. "I won't be back for supper."

Old Gustaf growled.

"Get in early," he ordered. "And tell Hans Miller what I say. Tell him you're through drivin' wagon. You're going to have a man's job!"

CHAPTER II

LIGHTNING

It was two o'clock when Norman walked out soberly from the house. His father, who spliced float lines on the back step, watched him go gloomily, without taking the trouble to answer his half-hearted good-by. Norman made deliberately across the beach while still within sight of his father's wrath. But once beyond it, he turned aside and proceeded north, up toward Ottowa Lake. He had small idea where he was going. Except that he had no intention of seeking Hans Miller this afternoon, or of imparting to him at once his father's decision that he must go as helper in the boat. He hated the Great Lakes intensely that minute. He hated fishermen. He hated boats, the smell of boiling nets, wind, waves, three-day blows.

Life was extraordinary. Here he was, his mother dead not a week, and this thing he had dodged all his life immediately caught up with him. A job in the fishing fleet!

He had worked more than three years for Hans Miller, who owned the store in Madrid Bay, helping the fat Dutchman put up ice and do other odd jobs in winter, in summer delivering the ice and fresh green vegetables to the back doors of resort cottages along Ottowa Lake. From the beginning his father had objected to the wagon. The day Miller took him on . . . he was past sixteen, but still barelegged . . . the boy had run down the wharf to his father's fish shanty to tell

him the news. Gustaf was mending gill nets. He was bent like a cobbler over his flat whalebone needle, while the fine string flashed backward and forward and his gnarled fingers drew the intricate knots in the mesh.

"Your name's Erickson!" he exploded when Norman paused for breath. "An Erickson driving a grocery wagon!"

Norman still remembered it resentfully. His mother had taken no part in that quarrel. Her bewildered black eyes were troubled at the argument, but she offered no counsel. Only once, and he remembered now the anxiety on her face, she had taken him aside and reminded him dutifully, but with no conviction, that other boys fished with their fathers.

Norman knew these other boys. He had gone to school with them, played ball with them on lively Sunday afternoons. He was of them and apart. The lakes had baptized them young, initiated them fully into the wind-bitten brotherhood of the fishing coast. Early seasons and late, on clear days and in cold pommeling winds, they drove their boats in from the fishing banks, only half-grown spindling fellows some of them, putting in safely at the dock with heavy smelly loads of fish.

It was the winds Norman dreaded; the rage of waves dismayed him. Always during the tempestuous weather of three-day blows, he remembered Gustaf's story of the schooner *Gottland* and the captain's dog. He'd not tell his father that.

"A dam' poor Erickson," old Gustaf would complain. "No stomach for winds, pfaugh!"

Gustaf made that "pfaugh!" an ugly word. He had a way of thrusting it into Norman's flesh like a fish knife. To be sure he need never hear it again. He had stayed in his father's house because of his mother, hadn't he? He tried to persuade himself that this was true. To-night, to-morrow, he could start out unmind-

ful of winds and weathers. He could leave the lake and all its distasteful memories, could settle somewhere beyond the hills.

And farm? He walked a bit more rapidly at the thought. He hated farms.

Five times, during vacations from school, his mother had sent him back in the hills to her father's miserable forty acres. It had surprised Norman, once there, to discover that there actually was a smell of soil as well as of sea. He preferred the sea, strangely. He did not enjoy feeding stock or battling obstinate weeds. He liked the girls among his many French cousins. They reminded him of Julie Richaud, a little French girl he knew in public school. But he disliked the boys, for no particular reason except that they were farmers, young black-haired yeomen, hurrying through their chores, smelling of sheep and the barn, built each one of them like a full sack of potatoes. He had walked adrift among these Frenchies, a blond thin-legged stranger, tall, with a promise of being taller. He despised the farm. But the lake? The lake bewildered him, plagued him, worried him, bullied his thoughts.

He used to mention this fear to his mother sometimes. Once after a week on the farm he asked her shyly how it happened that he could miss deep water as soon as he was out of its sight and dread it when he thought of sailing on it. Words were difficult for Norman's mother, in spite of her quick French tongue. Only occasionally could she express the feelings within her, so she told him that he was talking foolishness, and he never learned the answer.

Queer. He fancied his mother could have explained a number of things if she had dared.

He passed up the long gentle rise of the road behind the village and at the top sat down. Lake Michigan looked like blue velvet at this height, with wide ruffles

of white lace. Here, somewhere near this spot where he was sitting, he had fought once when he was a small boy. He had fought and lost. It was with a schoolmate named Eddie Baker, one day when he had been walking home with Julie Richaud.

The standard school in Madrid village, where Norman spent eight short, satisfying terms, was remarkable for only one thing. Two camps of children succeeded during school hours in living amicably under the same roof. Even in his youth Norman was conscious of these two discordant forces, because he belonged by right of blood to both of them.

One group, big, blond, slow, thorough, came from the neat homes of the village fishermen. Their paternal names had the same flavor as Norman's . . . Nelsons, Carlsons, Hartings, Andersons, with a scattering of Bakers and one good-for-nothing Irish family named Downey. The other group, small, quick, ill-disciplined, with sharp black eyes like Norman's mother, were the sons and daughters of French-Canadian farmers who came down in an onslaught from the back hills.

Julie Richaud was one of these. She arrived on an autumn morning when Norman was struggling with fourth-grade reading. He was eleven years old. He had grown too rapidly. His legs were bony, and the short knee breeches his mother had made for him four months before already had crawled upward, till they did not conceal the tops of his hand-knit stockings. He was self-conscious and his voice had just broken.

Norman liked school. The instructor, an indifferent young woman, ladled out all knowledge promiscuously, but in spite of that Norman and some fifty others got on. He did passably well with arithmetic. The broad, thin geography volume with its colored maps pleased his eyes and his imagination, though he had no particular desire to see its far places for himself. That involved

too many hardships of the kind his father described. Only in reading and language he did not flourish. The words in the books were too pale. His own father, for all his queer pronunciations, which were wrong according to the young woman at the head of the school, could "make you see" a thing better than those dubious immortals of the text-books. There were poems about the sea for one thing. They were unreal, Norman thought, and too nice. His father never pictured the sea as kindly. His waves never lapped. They were big, and always brutal.

Julie Richaud was a small, round, flashing-eyed girl, who cared less than nothing for any book or the confining routine of district school discipline. With her arrival Norman felt for the first time in his life a dim satisfaction that he was half-French. She made eyes at him for three days. On the fourth, during noon lunch period, she kissed him on the cheek.

"I like you!" she told him. "What funny yellow hair you got!"

Norman flushed and wriggled free. He stayed out of Julie's reach during the remainder of the fourth grade. The next year he was more friendly, even going so far as to run away from school with her one morning recess. They spent two ecstatic hours propped on their elbows at the end of the dock, counting the gulls that flew overhead. Julie, to whom Norman politely allotted the white ones, because he knew birds of that color were always more plentiful than gray, counted three hundred and sixteen to his third that number.

They returned to school in the afternoon. Together, after the others were dismissed, they wrote the word "truant" five hundred times. He had other excursions with Julie later. He discovered that she never had seen a fish egg, and brought her a pail full, which she took home and put to soak in the watering trough. Un-

known to his father he worked three months carving her a boat out in the wood house, and in the end a chunk of dry hemlock fell from the pile and crushed it.

It was an afternoon late in May . . . Norman was twelve years old and the fifth-year term had less than a week to run . . . when he walked with Julie to the top of this hill road where he now was sitting. His long, thin, bare legs kicked up the yellow dust. Several times he stopped to shy stones at sparrows on wire fences. He did not walk directly at her side, half the width of the roadway spread between them. Neither did he carry her books.

Julie was singing. It was not a tune. Merely something about bean soup hot and cold. Never for a moment was her tongue still. She stopped suddenly and said: "Eddie Baker cheated in spelling to-day, Norman. Twice. I seen him. What do you think teacher'd do if she catched 'im?"

Norman did not know. He could think of nothing that would appall Eddie Baker, not even the end of the world. At the top of the hill he said, "See you t'-morrow," and lay down by the roadside. He watched Julie skip on through the yellow dust, jerking her books at the end of a strap.

The weeds already were growing tall enough to conceal him where he lay. A farmer's wagon, crawling out from town, creaked its unoiled wheels up the hill. Norman, when Julie had turned the bend in the road, looked down the slope toward the wagon. It was a French-Canadian farmer's outfit, with great muddy wheels, and a pair of lean horses heaving at the tugs. It occurred to him, hopefully, that Julie might catch a ride home. The farmer was asleep on the high seat. His head jogged right and left, in a manner that suggested too much entertainment in Pug Downey's poolroom at Madrid. Between the wheels and through the

slowly revolving spokes, Norman made out a pair of bare feet running behind the wagon.

The horses came abreast of him, their driver still sleeping heavily. Norman perceived suddenly that the boy running behind was the same Eddie Baker about whom Julie had just been talking. He was a well-built, shifty-eyed, muscular youth, a year older than Norman, two inches shorter but a good ten pounds heavier. He had the name of a ready fighter in the Madrid Bay school. Norman knew him to be invincible. He had no animus against him. He saved that for Gustaf who said Eddie's stepfather, a man named Olson, was a net thief.

The wagon passed while Norman watched. Before he had time to speak young Baker twisted about. His was a flat scowling face among the fairer, round-headed boys in Madrid. He glanced up the road and down it, then crawled rapidly into the box of the wagon. He slid off directly, with two brown paper parcels in his arms. The farmer still slept. The thief scampered to the side of the road scratching his short, dusty bare legs in brambles.

As he dropped into the grass he saw Norman.

He did not speak for a moment. Then, when he lied, Norman felt for him an extravagant and pitiless scorn. Scorn was a human folly that he never had known before; it surged through him now with the exultant heat of a new untested emotion.

"He give it to me," Baker said sullenly.

Norman looked at him, his mild, wide, blue eyes expressionless, his sober blond face taking on for a moment a suggestion of pink.

"I'll leave you have some though," the other suggested, drawing nearer. His tone was conciliatory.

"You swiped it!" Norman said. He was not accusing. He was merely stating a fact in the blunt awkward way common to him. His father was like that in speech.

Old Gustaf made his statements firmly, as if he did not expect contradiction.

Eddie Baker looked a little startled at the word. But he did not attempt any further denial. He unwrapped the longer of the two parcels. It contained a wooden box of plug tobacco sealed in red paper. He pried at the lid. It was tacked in place. He gave up opening it for the time being and looked at Norman diplomatically.

"I'll go halves on it!" he offered.

"You swiped it!" Norman repeated. His voice arose somewhat, but still it did not indicate anger.

Over the ridge of the hill the squealing wheels of the farmer's wagon were turning slowly down the long incline toward Ottowa Lake and the French farms.

"I seen you steal," Baker countered, "seen you steal lots of times . . ."

"Me?" Norman asked.

"And I can lick you, one hand tied behind my back!"

Norman stood up slowly. He had no desire to fight. He knew Eddie Baker's prowess. But the formalities must be observed. "Try it!" he challenged.

Young Baker put down his two pilfered bundles carefully in the grass. Both boys circled once. Eddie struck first. Norman replied, too high. Eddie hit again. His hard swift fists caught Norman in the teeth. It was a one-sided combat after that though Norman tried desperately not to let it be so. In the dust of the road, with only the budding trees at either side of the ditches for spectators, they fought, bare fists, bare feet, dark head and light, around and again around. Blood ran from Norman's nose into his panting mouth. He dropped to his knees and Baker kicked him twice. The victor returned to the roadside, spit disdainfully into the dust and once more began to examine his tobacco box.

"I'll do it again," he warned, "afore the girls next time, if you dare squeal!" He tucked the bundles under his arm. "Hear me? Just go tell teacher. I dare you! Double dare you! Double dare you on a white horse and black toad!"

Again he spit disdainfully. He turned his back as if this controversy had scarcely been worth his while, and whistling through his teeth, moved by a wide detour toward the town.

Norman's head ached. His eyes were swelling. His throat burned. His lungs strained, his heart thrashed in his thin chest. Miserable and ill at ease, he watched Baker disappear into the woods north of Madrid Bay.

It did not occur to him to return to the village and tell the story. A juvenile shame restrained him. He had taken his beating. That was bad enough without having any one else know it. Irrelevantly his mind returned to Julie Richaud. What would she think of him now? He arrived home late for supper, and said nothing of the afternoon affairs.

Julie did not walk down to Madrid school the next year, for the Catholic sisters had built a new convent, a monstrous affair of cobblestones, at the crossroads on the other side of Ottowa Lake. Here the children of the farmers were hauled in overloaded busses and sleighs, and attendance at Madrid school was decreased a third. Norman saw little of Julie in the next three years. But recently he had stopped often on the roadside to talk to her, on Sundays sought her out at home.

He never mentioned Eddie Baker's thievery to any one. Even when he saw him chewing the rank black tobacco the day after their fight, pretending loftily that he was not sick, Norman said nothing. But he began to play less and less with Baker about the school yard. An enmity grew between them, born of a guilty secret which both boys had reason to keep.

Baker had "gone partners" with his stepfather when he was eighteen. He labored with stout endurance in their leaking smelly boat. Norman saw him often, perhaps an average of once a day through the year. They spoke to each other with an air of casual disinterest. But it seemed to Norman that Ed . . . he had outgrown the name Eddie . . . was showing a certain bravado in his presence of late. He bragged of his boat and looked pityingly upon all who labored ashore, no matter how industriously.

Norman envied him his assurance. It was so much like his own father's. Once or twice he tried to speak of it to Julie, thinking she might understand, but he never got farther than a word or two.

He could talk to Julie, though, about most things. She'd listen. She wasn't so set on his agreeing with her as the rest of the world. He arose briskly from the roadside and stretched his legs. Yes, he'd talk to Julie. At least she wouldn't answer "Pfaugh!" to everything he said. Not till this minute had he known where he wanted to go this afternoon. It was the Richauds whom he needed to see. It was because he was thinking unconsciously of Julie that he had climbed this hill in the first place, because of her that he remembered the old fight with Eddie Baker. Of course! He'd go to the Richauds.

He stepped out rapidly through the woods to the shore of little Ottowa Lake. This was the road he followed daily with Hans Miller's delivery wagon. It emerged from the birch trees into a high sandy plateau after a quarter of a mile. Here to the west was a splendid vista of Lake Michigan.

"Slash," the farmers called this cut-over pine land with its burned stumps and occasional gaunt hemlocks. A few niggardly farms struggled for existence in the cleared patches, straggling fields of potatoes for the

most part, rows of thin beans, square little plots of stunted corn. The earth was yellow, coarse with sand. Canada thistle splashed its purple through the potatoes. Milkweed pods were fattening.

A rising wind from Lake Michigan cut across the sandy earth and cried out ill-humoredly. Norman sniffed and turned about facing the gathering storm. Black clouds lay along the northwest horizon. The fishing boats would be coming in soon, running for port like a family of water beetles disturbed by the splash of a stone.

He left the main road at the next mail box and entered a lane bordered by a pair of snake fences with berry bushes in their angles. On the right side a field of green beans ripe for picking drowsed under the afternoon sun. Leaves and pods were dusty. On the left a garden in neat rows, its soil blacker than the surrounding earth, was withering in the dry air.

At the end of this lane a low plaster house, its roof shining with new shingles, stretched along the brow of a hill. A narrow valley sloped down behind it to the bed of a small rapid river. Somehow, on this visit, the Richaud house reminded Norman of the place that formerly belonged to his excitable French grandfather. His had been such a house. It was not so large, nor so well lighted with windows. The land was not so good up in the end of the county where his grandfather had lived. Only the earth of the dooryard was worn just as bare and hard as this, the milk pails, hanging in a row on the south wall, shone with the same intensity, the chickens were just as suspicious of visitors, there was the same kind of wooden, arm-power washing machine standing out in the shade of a tree.

Norman never had felt at home at his grandfather's. Even now as he stalked up the path that same sense of loneliness seized him, the loneliness of a person accus-

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tomed to wide wet horizons when his vision is cramped by hills. An old man was pumping water at the barnyard well. He was short and dark, with cheeks red as apples. He wore a limp black felt hat on the back of his head. His overalls, patched on both knees, had been bleached white by washings.

" 'Allo!" he cried. He almost ran toward Norman, his short legs pounding rapidly, water from the pail splashing up the dust. "Glad to see you, Norman boy! What you do out here? Quick, go in! I get chores out the way. Rain to-night!" He pounded on toward the barn.

"Julie . . ." Norman began.

"Julie's working," the old man shouted back vigorously. " 'Allo! Julie! Come see what the good saints brought you!"

Julie Richaud looked up startled from the apronful of peas she was shelling on the back steps. The porch lay in deep blue shadow, the yellow earth below it reflected the slanting sun. Julie sat on the top step. At the bottom a hen paced deliberately, stopping to examine Norman with serious critical eye.

"Norman!" Julie cried.

She stood up quickly, forgetting the peas that slid from her apron. She seemed embarrassed for a moment. She did not speak. Only her eyes moved, absorbing him.

Norman never had heard any one describe Julie's eyes. But he knew exactly what they were like from long admiration of them. They were large, dark, yet not black, and they gave the impression of changing color the longer one looked into them. One instant they were round, like the eyes of a gipsy, unfathomable as deep water and owning no color except the rich darkness of their depth. Again they lighted, and one imagined there was lavender in them; they were not round now, but squinting as her father squinted. An-

other second, if he were quick enough, Norman always sensed purple, and again the brown of autumn.

She had changed appreciably since their days in the Madrid school. She was not so tall as he, but even he realized that her figure was more mature. Her shoulders were as wide as they ever would be, her breast as round. When she leaned forward there was grace in the angle of her neck, which was brown, but very slender.

A painter would have said Julie's mouth was splendid, a little broad, with character there. He would have found her cheeks too sharply colored for his canvas, and would have toned down the pigments for the sake of a critical public unacquainted with Julie Richaud. A sculptor would have mentioned her nose first, for it was generous, full at the nostril and straight of bridge, a nose suited to marble . . . but he would have found her mouth difficult, and probably would have made it pout, which it never did.

"Norman," she was saying, "Norman, I'm sorry . . . about your mother, I mean. So sorry!"

She descended the steps slowly. Her voice was unlike her father's harsh gritty accents. Norman always thought that Germaine Richaud's speech had sand in it, as if the light wind-blown soil of north Michigan had lodged in his throat and would not wash down. Julie's was liquid, with a Latin flexibility, smooth as the music of Lake Michigan on a quiet day. She looked up soberly at Norman when she stood in front of him, her head tipped backward. Sunshine cast her black hair into blue and purple shades; sometimes there was even a hint of lavender in it, as there was in her eyes. She was wearing it drawn back straight this summer, uncut, knotted simply. There was a suggestion of curl in it. Above her red cheeks it made for an effective beauty.

"I could not go to the funeral," she said. "My mother went. I had to stay with the children."

Her hand was cool, with a capable grip to the fingers. There was something about her that belied the maturity of her healthy young body, something that suggested a little girl. It was this quality that Norman always liked, it made him think now of the time they counted the sea-gulls . . .

He took off his hat. His long blond hair rumpled in the wind. He could not speak for a moment, and then he simply said: "That's all right, Julie," and again stood silent.

Julie Richaud looked at him keenly. Hans Miller's wagon driver baffled her since he had grown up. Most of the boys around Madrid Bay were as easy to read as the children's primer, as simple now as they ever had been, but you couldn't tell what Norman Erickson might do or think. Her mother explained it by saying he was "born marked, and that's what comes of good French taking up with outsiders!"

"Sit down, Norman," Julie directed, "on the step here, out of the wind. It's blowing harder every minute." Again she studied him. "There's something worrying you. What is it . . . besides your mother?"

"Nothing much," Norman answered. "I just walked out. I wanted to think, and came farther than I meant. I was here before I knew it."

Julie nodded. She knew why Norman had come. It flattered her. He wanted to see her for no reason in particular.

"You think we'll get a storm?" she asked cheerily. "We need rain. Did you notice coming up? Everything so dry!"

Norman looked about, sniffing warily in the same way his father did. Clouds marched up the sky, a black battalion with reinforcements of fresher winds. Gulls, blown in from the lake, soared high on tense wings into the making gale. They were like old Gustaf in the way

they flew, positive, headstrong, resentful of the wind that pushed them back. Lightning rasped out of the north. It came without warning, sudden sheets from the heart of a somber bank, beating spitefully on the earth. Julie Richaud shivered.

"I don't like it!" she said. "Lightning, clouds, storms . . . I always want to cry. We'd better go into the house."

Norman stammered. "I don't like it either. It's a funny thing, Julie . . ."

"What?"

He plunged recklessly.

"The way my father likes bad weather, way my mother didn't. She used to tell me how it thundered worse than the crack of doom the night I was born."

"*Zut!* What a *porte-bonheur* to hang around one's neck! Born to lightnings!" The girl looked at him curiously. His face was hot, trembling a little, as her own felt in church after confessional. He might be confessing himself from his distraught expression, confessing some great unpardonable sin. "Are you afraid of storms?" she asked.

"No!" Norman protested. Then: "I'm not sure, Julie. I've never been far out in a bad blow. It must be tough from what my father tells . . ."

Germaine was shouting noisily at the pump, demanding another bucket from one of his small black-haired sons. Julie leaned forward swiftly and put both hands on Norman's knees.

"Listen, Norman," she said, "it's all right to tell me that. But don't tell anybody else. Other folks might not understand it the way I do, Norman. You're not afraid of storms. You may think you are, but you're not. You're just afraid you might be. Sure, we all of us make some fuss. We tell the kids in fun like, '*Allez,* under the bed!' That's all talk. You know it.

Your mother wasn't scared. Not really. Why'd she marry a sailor if she was?"

Norman was silent. He couldn't answer that. He'd often wondered himself why his mother had married a sailor, wondered at least why she married old Gustaf. He thought that Julie was very much like his mother in a good many ways. The pert tip to her head . . . his mother always bent her neck a little when she was deeply interested. And the words as they poured out of Julie's mouth reminded him of his mother's words. There seemed to be so little time in the world to say all that Julie had to say.

She arose briskly.

"Come," she bade, "it's raining. Let's go inside."

It was pleasant in the Richaud living-room. Rain thumped down upon the hard new shingles of the roof, making a hollow, drumming sound, unlike the dull beat of storms against the heavily beamed house of the Ericksons on the beach. In all ways the room was unlike his father's kitchen. He knew his mother would have found it much more friendly here than in the stiff seamanly house she had kept for Gustaf all those years. The furniture stood about in comfortable disorder. The walls were ceiled in hemlock, stained a dark brown. There were pictures on them, lithographs of children and of dogs, framed mottoes; no ships, no hint at all of the sea.

Germaine dripped in from the chores at five o'clock. The rain still pounded against the roof with a gusty wind thrashing after it.

"Come . . . sausages for supper!" Germaine insisted. "Sure, Norman will stay. We fix your place!"

Norman was glad that he remained. Julie's father talked so fast and so hard that one forgot the weather and the morrow. His laugh was full throated like a popper of corn.

It was dark when Norman started back to town but the rain had stopped and the wind fallen with it. He walked slowly, as if anchors dragged at his legs. He felt disheartened as soon as he turned down the lane. Why had he come up to the Richaud farm? He had said nothing he intended. He had meant to be bold, to tell Julie Richaud that he was leaving Madrid, going as far away inland as his feet would take him, to some place where he never need lie awake through another hideous night with the drum of surf spelling out ghastly stories in his sleepless ears. He had been afraid to tell her that. She would not have believed him. Nor had he mentioned his father's plans for him in the fishing fleet.

He grew tired and chill as he walked through the darkness, as if a chunk of Hans Miller's ice lodged on his shoulder and melted, dripping down his back. Afraid? Why had he told Julie he was afraid of wind and storm? He never had been at sea in a blow. Who knew? He might not be afraid; perhaps all men, even his own father, sometime or other felt this way.

He came out upon the open ridge that dropped away suddenly to the town. Lake Michigan lay below, vast, mysterious, cloaked in the subtle and impenetrable secrets of the night. West by northwest the cloud banks ripped apart and stars looked down curiously. Far to the left the steady white beam of Blind Man's Eye lighthouse blazed like an eternal fixed planet through the dark. Norman watched it for a long peaceful minute. Farther west a passenger steamer stood up sharply against the opaque distance, glittering with its strings of electric lamps. It moved on majestically and Norman's eyes returned to the light. It was twenty miles by land to Blind Man's Eye lighthouse, thirteen by water. He never had been ashore there. But all his life the light had been a companion. In its beam,

no matter what the weather, he could see a deep calm security.

He strode on. Below the hills, above the talkative wash, the town of Madrid Bay huddled against its dunes, showing a sad sprinkle of dimly lighted windows and misshapen blots of luminous reflection on wet roofs. The street was deserted. Only the pool hall blazed magnificently, matching uncurtained windows against the humbler higher stars.

Pug Downey, its owner, stood on the porch, spitting enormously, his wooden leg propping open the screen door. Downey had the reputation in Madrid Bay of being too free with his tongue. Freshwater seamen did not believe his yarns. Paying for an evening's amusement at two and a half cents a cue, they winked their eyes indulgently and made sure of their change. Outside the door, they told each other contemptuously that poor Pug, for all his talk of two-legged days at sea, didn't know a main sheet from a dry salt herring.

He waved his arms excitedly when he saw Norman, and immediately hobbled back into his establishment. Norman approached. The room was silent as he opened the door. No one was playing, the balls were racked. There was little smoke. A crowd of fishermen pressed together in the back of the room. Two women stood among them.

"Here he is!" Pug Downey cried importantly.

"Come here, you, Norman," three men called out together.

Upon the bar stretched Gustaf Erickson. His gray hair lay in thin wet strings across his forehead. His eyes were closed, lips battened tight, his cheeks whiter than Norman ever had seen any man's. One hand lay across his chest, the other hung without purpose from the counter.

"He ain't dead yet," Pug Downey said.

Water dripped from Gustaf's boots. On the counter stood a glass of whisky.

"What happened?" Norman demanded.

No one answered. A quick hot tingle ran over his scalp. A man gripped his arm. It was Jim Nelson, an old sea mate of Gustaf.

"Where you been?" Nelson asked. "Come here." He pushed Norman ahead through the crowd. "Sure we've call't the doctor. McCarthy from Copperhead. We've give Gus a shot or two of stuff, so's to hold him out. McCarthy ought to be here by now. Where you been?"

His voice was accusing. Norman stared bewilderedly at the old man's grim oyster face and did not answer. Nelson had sailed salt water with Gustaf Erickson when both were young. The chance that follows the seas had flung them together in Madrid.

"Boys can tend him till McCarthy comes," the fisherman said. "Lor', we sure hunted all over this dam' peninsula for you. We thought the old man was dead first we brung him in . . . dam' dirty weather!"

Norman waited. He felt sweat on his forehead. He put up his hand and wiped it away. It could not be sweat. He was shivering. He wished Nelson would hurry.

"Battle Ax mail boat put out just afore dark, 'bout sundown," Nelson said. "Couple of ladies wanted to go along across with Lem Hardy. Too much weather, he says. Told 'em he'd come back and get 'em tomorrow. He just puts off when the thunder and lightning lets go. Where you at, you didn't hear that thunder?"

"I heard it," said Norman.

"Well, the lightning hits the mail boat. She wasn't fifty fathom off the end the crib. Sets her afire. Gus . . . your paw . . . he's down at the fish shack,

tendin' some gear or other. They was a mean sea runnin'. Lem Hardy ought to knowed better than go out hisself. Well, he didn't know better."

"My father . . .?" Norman began.

"Never waited a minute," Nelson said. "Casts off alone soon's he sees the fire. He ought to knowed better too. Lem's boat rammed against the cedar poles in that old breakwater south of the harbor. Your paw carried a line over, but the sea's runnin' so dirty he can't hold the two boats together. We was all down shore by that time. We see Gus duck into Lem's cabin once. That mail boat burnt hard I tell ye! We see from here he never could get Lem out. I told you it was a mean sea! Well, I guess Gus saw it was no use, couldn't get through the fire. He'd give it up and was tryin' to get back on his own boat when the two of 'em pulled apart and he goes down a-tween 'em. They was smashin' together right hard."

Nelson wiped his lips with the back of his hand. The dying wind hooted outside. Norman shuddered.

"Sea washed him in about where that old pier used to run out," Nelson said bluntly. "Some of the boys brung in his boat, knowed your paw wouldn't want that boat t' break up. He's got a busted leg and back, I figger. Least somethin's wrong with his back. We can't get no sense out o' what he says. Lem Hardy! Lor', he went down with the mail boat! Aggie Parson's boys is along shore now, waitin' to see if his corpse gets washed up. We sent for the coast guard from Blind Man's Point, wanted to make it regular and all. Telephoned right off for McCarthy. He ain't very fast!"

Doctor McCarthy, fat, middle-aged and undisturbed, arrived at the pool-room in thirty more minutes. He sniffed the stale smoke as he strode through the door, swinging a limp black bag. The men stopped their talking. The doctor's face became severe.

"What's happened? Why's he wet?" he demanded.

Pug Downey attempted the story.

"Time I lost my leg," he began importantly . . .

"Open those windows, Downey, all of them," Doctor McCarthy interrupted. "Get outside, you fellows. Two of you stay. What's the matter with you, lad?" he swung critically on Norman. "Why *you* so white? This isn't your funeral! Your father? This your father? Take him along," he bade Jim Nelson, "get home and fix a bed. You live up the beach? Got a bedroom down-stairs, I suppose? Have it warm. Take some stones, so big, heat 'em hot and wrap 'em up in paper."

He ripped open his black bag.

"Nasty business . . ." he whirled around. Norman had shifted his feet, breathing quickly. "Get along, I say!" the doctor ordered. "Have your house warm!"

Norman scuffed blindly out of the pool-room door, stepping twice on Jim Nelson's boot heels.

"Good man, your paw," Nelson said awkwardly. "There's a real sailor! Tellin' me to-day you're goin' partners in the fish boat with him!"

Norman mumbled. He could see shadows moving about inside the pool-room as he looked back at it from the street, clean-etched angular figures working with extreme mechanical precision. They loomed big in the bright windows, halted with arms in silhouette, showed profiles of black, then glided away leaving vacant rectangles of harsh light.

"Think his back's broke?" asked Norman.

"Looks like it to me," answered Jim Nelson. "Ought to knowed better'n to go out alone in such a dirty sea."

Fishermen brought Gustaf Erickson home on a shutter after a long hour. He was breathing better,

Norman thought. The piece of sail thrown over his chest lifted and fell regularly in a motion reminiscent of Lake Michigan. Coming through his own doors he opened his hard lips and muttered a barbaric oath.

"Left thigh is fractured and his right shoulder blade," Doctor McCarthy said. "There's a bad concussion . . . bump on the head, that is. I need some hot water."

"Is he like to pull out?" asked Norman.

"Oh, yes, I reckon so. Pretty tough wood, you fishermen. Can't kill you off. No way except drowning." He arranged the hot stones in the bed. "Of course, I wouldn't say he'll be around to-morrow. Stay in bed all fall and winter, I suspect. Won't ever work again."

CHAPTER III

A HARD SKIPPER

SEPTEMBER splashed north Michigan with color, a lunatic month spilling all the red paint of the seasons. October brought clean hard frosts. November lost its immensity of clouds, the sky grew pinched and penurious with its daylight. Winter whipped down early on the upper lakes and Gustaf Erickson still stayed abed. His grim spirit took on harsher irritability the longer he lay an invalid. He bullied Norman and his shipmate Nelson, screamed out the old, bitter, forgotten abuse with which he once had driven his schooner crews.

Propped on the pillows in his bed, he demanded more than men could give, cursed each kindness, belabored and threatened his son, talked forever of "To-morrow, when I get up." Norman was a clumsy nurse. He understood dimly the anguish Gustaf suffered. It was unbefitting that a man of his frame should lie abed. The kind of religion that Gustaf esteemed made provision for a self-respecting seaman to die afloat.

On Sunday afternoons, when Nelson, the Parson boys or Mel Pierce's wife offered themselves an hour or two as buffets for Gustaf's temper, Norman plowed back through the snow to the Richaud farm, talked with Julie, and brought home the fresh eggs and milk that the doctor had prescribed. Julie was light-hearted, and always glad to see him. After all, things weren't so bad, Norman thought as he was tramping home. Julie didn't nag him. Her hands warmed his own when he

took them to say good-by. She gave him a book the first time he saw her in January and suggested that the winter wouldn't be so long if he read. Norman took it uncertainly. Julie seemed more like his black-eyed mother every time he saw her. No, things weren't so bad. . . .

But at his father's kitchen door contentment left him. Old Gustaf lay like a thundering, unshaved Viking in his room that faced the lake. He tore at the red flannel bedcovers.

"Milk!" he screamed when Norman set the food down beside him. "Eggs! Milk! That's rich found for a seaman, ain't it? It's pork I'm needin'! I'll learn you, come spring! You ain't my master. You like this lazy business of stayin' round the house. I know! You ain't a fit Erickson. Come spring, I'll make one out'n you, by the Mackinac!"

Norman tried to read the book Julie gave him. It was an old French novel about country folk, and he was not interested in it. It reminded him of the poems in the reader at school that were too nice to be real. Only the people in this book were not nice. A scurvy lot he thought. But he read it through. The next time he saw Julie he asked if she knew where he could find something of the sea. Old Gustaf might like a story of that kind, if it were fierce enough. The Richaud household possessed nothing that smacked remotely of salt. A neighbor had *Robinson Crusoe,* however, and Norman took it home. Gustaf cursed when his son suggested reading it aloud. But he lay still through two chapters and then went to sleep quietly. They finished *Robinson Crusoe.* After that Gustaf would have nothing more. Norman gave it up. He granted that books probably seemed dull to Gustaf. Nobody could ever put anything into a book that came up in the least to Gustaf's own stories.

It was not until April, with the ice kicking to pieces on the shore and hungry gulls sailing over the fishing town, that Gustaf Erickson took his first cautious step. He had wasted during the winter. His cheek-bones, always high and sharp, protruded like shelves on his face. His chest had fallen in, making a cavity between his big round shoulders. He coughed incessantly, snarled, did not reply when spoken to, but sat moodily for hours by the window, staring thirstily at the lake, swearing black oaths if any one disturbed him.

Each day, at length every hour of each day, he talked of the new fishing season. He found ecstatic delight in grumbling to Norman of work to be done upon the boat, of nets to be repaired, lines to be spliced, of the thousand small tasks that usher in spring labor on the fishing coast. Norman himself became taciturn. After all, what difference did anything make? He had tied his mind into knots trying to think out his problems. He was going to fish, was he? Well, all right. He'd fish. Gustaf had decreed it.

Like a malevolent destiny the elder Erickson hovered over his son. Each day he added to his promises of harder tasks. Norman did not understand many of his orders for work about the fish shack.

"When we go on the boat," Gustaf was wont to preface his remarks, "I'll learn you that on the boat, and don't you forget!"

On the first day of May, Gustaf walked down the planks to the fish shanties and leaned on a cedar stick while he discovered mean chores for his son. Norman performed them, streaming with sweat. He objected to none of them. They were only hard work, scraping ribs, daubing on tar, patching, painting. He could see that it was a good boat; a wet one, but it had good planks and a good engine. He overhauled it thoroughly in the impulse of despair, laboring till his back ached.

"Next week," Gustaf croaked daily, "'bout next week we'll set them nets. I'll make a man out'n you!"

Gustaf slept every noon there on a pile of nets in front of his fish house. During that time, for one warm quiet hour, his son had peace and thoughts and a lazy pipe of tobacco to himself. The lake lay flat as a table in early May. Norman spread face up in the sand, eyes on a cloudless, sleepy horizon, noon after noon scanning the lake in its pleasant phase.

Calm days! He felt like an Erickson then. Vessels beckoned, and he knew a short kinship with them, a kinship that fled on the first hint of storm. He could see passenger palaces steaming north and southward. Hard smoking tugs with tows of lumber barges puffed along offshore; low black coal and ore carriers showed in the distance, lying on the water like dachshunds, their deckhouses poking up head and tail; there were humble little packets, and car ferries fat as ocean liners, running back and forth out of Frankfort and Manitowoc and the ports of Wisconsin.

A smooth sandy coast-line arched away from Madrid. Far to the north it arose bleakly to the headlands of Mustache Point. Blind Man's Point lay southward. When he was at work in the fish shanty on clear days Norman could see the tall white shaft of the lighthouse on its tip. Blind Man's Eye, the sailors called it; there was ironic sea talk for you! That fixed white Eye distrusted the lake on blowy nights as much as he did, he wagered. It was always friendly to him. How had his father, commanding his leaky old schooner years ago, ever missed Blind Man's coast, to pile up a few hours later on Mustache?

Mustache was safe, compared with the Blind Man. Old fishermen said that more timbers were sunk on Blind Man's bottom than the lumber hookers could carry out of Michigan by judgment day. Naked ribs of once

gallant schooners tilted among her rocks; tamarack and cedar spars poked up through the sand; battered planks, twisted irons jumbled all together in a derisive laugh at skippers who lost their way. Certainly Blind Man's Eye knew all the devilment of a lake!

The fishing boat awaited only the slow knitting of Gustaf's bones. The nets were packed snugly in their boxes atop the cabin with new maître cords, new wooden floats, new lead anchor weights in place. In an orderly stack beside the fish shanty door the buoy poles leaned in a trim bundle, each with its red marker-flag atop.

Ed Baker, whose shack huddled next to old Gustaf's, stopped often in the Erickson doorway on his way to and from the town. He had little to say to Norman. Always a frosty restraint kept the two apart. Neither could forget the day upon the road when they were boys, when young Ed revealed himself a thief and Norman took his thrashing. But the flat-faced, thick-shouldered Baker talked interminably with Gustaf, talked price of fish and the depth of this channel or that, and the way new hollow metal floats had of collapsing under the pressure of deep water. A young fisherman could learn many worth-while details of his trade from the elder Erickson.

"There's a neat lad," Gustaf would say when Baker had gone. "If you had some of his stuff in you . . ."

Norman never replied. But he came to regard Baker's visits with suspicion. He wished now that he had told his father of their fight when he was a youngster. Gustaf despised a thief.

Then one morning . . . it was the last week in May . . . Gustaf said: "Go crank the engine. We set nets to-day."

Norman glanced at the calm lake, then at his father's wasted figure. Gustaf's hands trembled over the line he was untangling. He had refused his breakfast that

morning, had staggered as he walked down the wharf.

"We best wait till to-morrow," Norman said.

"Wait?"

"You wait," Norman amended. "I'll go to-day. Nelson can show me how to set these . . ."

"You?" Gustaf laughed unsteadily. "You'd drown yourself! What you know about settin' nets. Crank the engine. I'm going. *You* can stay ashore. . . ."

Ed Baker lounged through the door. He had heard the querulous voice of Gustaf. Jim Nelson, who had been dozing in a corner on a stack of old nets, awakened saying, "No, no! Mebbe to-morrow, Gus, not to-day!"

Gustaf did not turn his head.

"I'll take you out to the banks," Ed Baker volunteered, "if Norm don't want to go."

"He ain't fit to go," Gustaf muttered, "he ain't fit to be son o' me!"

Norman dropped the edge of the pond net he was mending. He saw Baker grinning in the door, saw his father's harsh profile and Nelson's sleepy troubled face. Beyond these three, through the open window, across the wide waters of the lake, the white tower of Blind Man's Eye suddenly beckoned to him. He stood up, his shoes creaking, and moved to the door.

"Ain't a fit son to me!" his father repeated.

"Then I'd better not stay," Norman told him. "I'd better go where I am fit." He looked again at the distant lighthouse.

Desire grew within him. He had felt it before, vaguely. Once, when he was seventeen, an itinerant preacher who stopped for three Sundays at the Madrid Bay mission house, had put the idea into his head. He had said all men, some time or other in their lives, experienced a definite call to service. He did not explain what the word meant. Norman, considering the remark

amid the noisy whisperings of the rear pew, could think then, as now, of only one service that ever had called him.

"I've been calculating on going away," he said.

Gustaf's eyes widened.

"You? Going away? Where?"

"Lighthouse service," Norman answered. "It's a decent job. A seamanly job."

"Seamanly?" Gustaf repeated. He laughed with an ugly humor.

"It's a job I'd like," Norman said stubbornly.

"A good seamanly job," old Jim Nelson supported him.

Gustaf scowled. His hands dropped the maître lines and his short, heavily-knuckled fingers bent and unbent. His sick face turned from yellow to purple, his eyes grew smaller.

"You?" he cried. "You'd go to the lights? Quit fishing?" He paused. "Go crank that boat!" he added.

"I'll run you out to the banks," Baker offered again.

Norman swung about. He stepped squarely in front of Baker, glaring into the shorter man's face.

"Don't you touch that boat!" he cried. "Hear me? Keep away from my father! Stop playing up to him. . . ."

"Lighthouse," old Gustaf grunted with the perverse emphasis of a sick man. "Lighthouse, eh? They wouldn't have you!"

Baker laughed. Norman's fist drew into a tight knot. Baker, seeing it, and the cold whiteness of the other's face, dodged through the door, and as if he thought suddenly of some task that needed him, hurried along the wharf. Father and son and patient Jim Nelson remained.

"No lighthouse would have the likes o' you!" Gustaf cried.

"I'll go see!" Norman answered.

He was standing outside the shack before he knew it. Nelson followed him.

"Take care of the old man a few days?" Norman asked.

"Sure," Jim Nelson spit into the river as it ran out to meet the lake. "Sure, I'll stand your watch a bit. He's my shipmate, ain't he?"

Each morning of the five days that followed, Ed Baker came to the door of Gustaf Erickson's house and inquired for Norman. Jim Nelson answered faithfully each time. Norman would be back next day. Jim did not trust Baker.

"I've hankered after joinin' up with the lights m'self, Gus," Nelson attempted to say once or twice.

"They're for wimmen," old Gustaf muttered, "lazy, pokin', landlubberin' wimmen."

Norman stepped in unexpectedly on the sixth morning. He looked thinner, there were new serious lines around his eyes. He showed no surprise at seeing his father in bed.

"Hello," he said to Gustaf. "Hello, Jim," and passed through to his own room. He did not hear when his father howled after him. Try as he would, the old man's ire could set off no dry spark this morning in the temper of his son. It was a new Norman who returned to Madrid Bay, close-mouthed, unexcited, more mature, a little detached. There was nothing in his attitude to indicate what he had done in his absence or what he had not.

"Your paw was took sick," Nelson confided when the two were alone. "He carried on pretty squally. I lugged him home." After a minute he added: "You're goin' to the lights?"

Norman shook his head.

"I'm staying here," he said. "Sure, I went down

to Milwaukee. Took the examination. There's a few vacancies, they said. But . . . I been thinkin' it over, Jim, on the way home. I guess I shouldn't have gone. Here's my place. I came back to stay."

"Pass the tests?" Nelson asked.

"Won't know for a few days. But that won't make any difference. I don't have to go if I do get an appointment."

"No, don't have to. But it's a good job, Norman, no matter what Gus says . . ." he paused lamely.

"He's my father."

"Sure. But he's a hard skipper!"

"It don't matter," Norman answered.

Gustaf stayed in bed eight days this time. On the ninth he arose obdurately and demanded his clothes. He rode out to the fishing grounds that morning with his son and Jim Nelson, both of them submissive. Nelson took the tiller. In a broken chair on the stubby forward deck, Gustaf Erickson scowled at the sea, glared at the land and drove his crew tyrannically.

They lifted five boxes of white fish nets next day in a freshening wind. The green lake stirred restlessly under a melancholy haze. Distant gray fogs crawled along the surface, shrouding the horizon. Rollers slipped under the blunt bow of the motor-boat with an oily ominous gesture. Gulls, flying with the craft, squalled, shook their wings and spread their yellow legs behind them. This was the kind of day Norman hated. Each changeable gust presaged foul weather.

"All toes!" the old man scolded. "This landlubber here is my boy, Nelson, and look at him, all toes. Be you fear'd of the water?" he asked Norman savagely. "Lean over, get a-holt on that buoy! Now heave!"

"I'm not afraid!" Norman contradicted.

"Pfaugh!" muttered Gustaf.

The nets were lifted and new ones set. It was noon

when Norman cranked the engine and pointed the bow toward Madrid Bay breakwater. Under the low cabin roof eleven hundred pounds of fish still flapped listlessly in the barrows.

"She's makin' to blow," Jim Nelson predicted.

"Let her!" Gustaf snapped. "She's blowed afore this."

Net reels screeched idly on shore. In the shelter of the breakwater of rock and cedar poles that guards the estuary of Tamarack River, Norman unloaded the boat, cleaned the fish, iced them and packed them for shipment south. It was mid-afternoon before he had finished scrubbing tables and floor. He carried the cleaning boxes out to the sand, emptied them and watched the gulls sweep down. Then, while Nelson spun the reel, he straightened the wet nets.

"Wash down the boat," Gustaf ordered; "when you get it clean, come home."

Norman did not obey directly. He stopped at the post-office first and watched the stage from Copperhead station drop its load of mail and express. There was a letter addressed to him. The heavy envelope was marked "Official Business, U. S. Department of Commerce." Norman pinched off a corner, thrust in a finger and ripped the end. He started to read the typewritten sheet. When he saw Ed Baker watching him, among the other men in the post-office, he thrust the paper indifferently into his pocket and stepped out into the windy street.

At the first cedar clump he halted, ostensibly to light his pipe. The match blew out and he did not bother to strike another.

He had passed his examination for the lighthouse service.

Well, what of it? He was not going to the lights. That vision had passed. It had been pleasant while it

endured, a dream of honorable duties, of freedom, of worth-while labor, of opportunity to prove himself . . . merely a dream. Gustaf was flesh and bone and temper. Gustaf was his father. He would remain with him . . . he would fish . . . accept abuse and hardship. And in the end either drown or earn the name of coward? Perhaps. His father convinced him at times. He was an Erickson coward, without hope of redemption.

He had passed the examination. And been appointed to a light. He could not take the appointment. Hadn't he decided that? But at least he had tasted independence. A brief touch of triumph came into his heart. An examining board of the United States lighthouse service had not found him entirely without merit! Gustaf would cry "Pfaugh!" to that, and say it was due to luck.

It might have been luck. Certainly luck had played a part in the appointment. He had blurted out "Somewhere near Madrid!" when the district superintendent, an old sailor almost as big as Gustaf, had asked him where he would prefer appointment if there were opportunity to choose. Norman had given himself away with that! The superintendent smiled in a superior fashion as if he were thinking: "Just for that, young man, I'll send you to Poverty Isle or Hawaii or some place just as far away!"

But the appointment was to Blind Man's Eye.

He stuffed the envelope back into his pocket and trudged toward home. The last hundred yards lay along the beach. Waves barked at his feet. He looked out unexcitedly at the broad threatening face of the lake. Black bars of narrow, wind-twisted cloud imprisoned the sun. Omens of evil weather, those clouds. A summer blow was making!

There would be three days of it, three screeching,

tormenting days, days to keep sane men ashore, to bind masters of ore carriers to their bridges, and make lake widows turn miserably, clutching at memories, in their narrow beds. Well, what of it? He was beginning to accept the sea.

Jim Nelson sat moodily on the Erickson back steps.

"Evenin', Jim," Norman said. He was opening the door.

Nelson took the pipe from his teeth and motioned with it.

"Listen," he directed. "She's goin' to blow."

"Blowing now."

"We ain't much sense settin' them nets to-day. Be all tore to pieces. I told him, 'fore we put 'em out. Gus says now he's goin' to lift day after to-morrow, come seven gales. Thought you might kind of start talkin' him around it."

"Me?" the son of Gustaf Erickson frowned. "I can't talk him around anything, Jim."

"No. I s'pose not," Nelson grunted. "Well, we'll wait and see. See how the weather plays us."

The weather played foul. All night the wind grew noisier, shrilling gustily about the sand-heaped corners of the house, thundering upon doors, squealing through the growth of scrub cedars in the garden. At each fresh blast the Erickson house trembled as if a mighty fist were beating against its front planks.

Nelson dozed in the parlor, fully dressed, with his boots on. Gustaf had dropped into an easy and contented slumber with the first rise of the gale, as if its sound were a lullaby and he a tired child, fretted into a deep fatigue. Under the roof Norman lay wakeful. Once he arose, about twelve o'clock, lighted the lamp and read again the letter that had come to him. He'd have to send back that appointment. But he could feel satisfaction in it just the same.

He returned to bed. The wind screamed higher every hour. Again in the dark he remembered his mother and the way she had stolen in to see that he was covered on nights like this. Memory of her led to other memories. Grotesque and abominable memories of Gustaf's hideous stories, nightmares that had tortured him as a little boy, the story of the captain's wife and the captain's dog . . . just such a wind as this had torn open the cabin of the schooner *Gottland*. . . .

The people of the town gathered on the dunes next morning to scan the lake for trouble. Stinging spray hit their faces. Great breakers raced ashore, showing white teeth at the obstruction of the outer bar. Their noise was like drum-fire. The sky looked unsympathetically upon land and water, haughty and cold gray from its vast distance. The sun hid, and a wet horizon arose and fell in short running ridges. Mustache Point bulked upward on the north; to the south, the tower of Blind Man's Eye arose clear as a cardboard silhouette. Norman knew seas were plunging like battalions of shock troops around its rocks, those rocks the mariners called Blind Man's Teeth.

He stood a moment with the crowd.

"Like to be hell on nets," a fisherman shouted.

At noon Norman returned home. No stack or spar had passed up lake or down. His father was splicing lines in the shed to leeward of the house. He did not speak.

The wind raced faster next morning, the lake howled more threateningly, waves smashed harder against the beaches. At six o'clock Gustaf Erickson hobbled into his son's bedroom.

"Out that bed," he ordered. "Turn out! Time to start!"

"To lift nets?" Norman sat up, suddenly wide awake.

"Sure, to lift nets. Full o' fish, ain't they? I had my breakfast. I ain't a habit of sleepin' all day. Coffee's hot. Get a move on."

A half dozen fishermen, Ed Baker among them, were standing in Gustaf's shack when Norman arrived at the dock. No other boat was venturing out, men were arguing like children against Jim Nelson's consent to go along with Gustaf.

"You must be wantin' trouble," one said. "Me, I'll sink soon enough. I don't go out askin' for drowndin'. Why *you* go, Nelson?"

"Me? Drowndin'? What *you* know about drowndin's?" Nelson bit his pipe nervously. "Gus is goin', ain't he? Hell and high water ain't stoppin' him. Think I'll crawfish? Me and him was shipmates 'fore most o' you was born. Fine idee you got o' l'yalty!"

Gustaf stretched his legs as soon as his son came in. He had sat morosely in a corner, giving ear to none of the talk.

"I been waitin' you," he growled to Norman. "Fine lazy time to get started."

The wind roared a blasphemous accompaniment to his words. The fish shanty shuddered under its blows. Norman knocked out his pipe.

"We'll not lift to-day," he said positively. "Nobody's going out. I come home to take care of you. I didn't need to come. But I'll take care now I'm here. We're not going out."

For the first time in his twenty-one years he defied his father.

Gustaf's obstinate face showed no sign of emotion. There was a vacancy in his eye. He did not hear or did not comprehend.

"Get a move on," he urged. "Time to start."

"No!" Norman answered.

Ed Baker laughed.

"Get out, men," Norman commanded. "And you," he addressed Baker, "you get out first! Out, or by Mackinac . . ."

The men of the fleet gaped. Never before had Madrid Bay heard that brittle hardness in the voice of Gustaf's son. Never had they seen such rage in his eyes, which usually were mild. Baker backed through the door, the other men crowding on his toes.

"Don't step in here again, Baker!" Norman shouted.

He turned to his father.

"I'm ready to do a man's job, sir, any day it's fit. . . ."

"Crank the boat!" Gustaf interrupted.

"We're not going," Norman said.

He stepped close to the old man. Only the two Ericksons and Jim Nelson, who was the friend of both, remained in the room. Gustaf looked into his son's eyes, Norman into his father's. Each saw there a stubbornness, a wilfulness, a slow, cold, unyielding determination. Gustaf started to speak. Norman shook his head.

"We're not going out, sir," he said.

Gustaf understood this time. His red eyelids wrinkled. His lean face twisted as if some sharp agony convulsed it. His knotty right hand lifted forward slowly, one short finger pointing toward the door.

"You get out too!" he said. He looked at Norman with compassionless eyes. "Whose boat is this? I'll have no cowards about my cabin. You don't belong to no crew of mine. They's too much Frenchie in you. No boy of mine! Wantin' to go in the lights . . . the lazy, pokin', landlubberin' lights!"

Norman did not speak.

Gustaf repeated: "Get out!"

He folded his arms. Rage had chilled his tongue. He spoke with a mighty dignity. His was not the voice

of a brawling fisherman, ordering a fisherman's son from a humble door. Norman, in spite of the appalling dismay that clutched his heart, felt something splendid in his father's slow speech, something aloof, something haughty and assured. This was a tone that tolerates no argument, that assumes obedience.

Norman stood his ground stiffly, his chin up. He had failed. But never had he seen his father so unrelenting, or so magnificent. Immobile as stone Gustaf waited for his son to leave. Viking blood had stirred in him. His blue eyes looked straight ahead, merciless; his drawn sick face was terrible in its strength.

"You're scart to go out and lift nets in a little blow," he said. "I'll have no coward for son. You don't need come back."

Norman turned, and left the shack. He stumbled over a fish barrow just outside the door. Ed Baker slouched near the end of the dock, his oilskins whipping in the wind. He laughed audibly. Norman hesitated, then stalked on. What did he care for Baker? He was putting Ed Baker and all Madrid Bay behind him. It was not his choice. He had not deserted. His father had decided for him. In his pocket he still held an appointment to the lighthouse service.

He was done with this existence. He swallowed hard. He could not stay now. His father would be better off without him. These rages would kill old Gustaf some time. But he only wished that by one single act he had proved himself. Not for the sake of others, but to assure himself. And after all, he did care for Gustaf's opinion.

"Coward!" old Gustaf had said. "I'll have no coward for a son!"

Was he a coward?

CHAPTER IV

BLIND MAN'S EYE

It was twenty blustery miles to Blind Man's Eye. Norman ran out impetuously from his father's house, an old dunnage bag over his shoulder, in it all that he owned. He glanced back once at the harbor. His father's fish shanty thrust up its gray roof above the dunes. Gulls hugged together in a tight white row along the ridge, seeking protection from the wind. They were welcome to rest there; old Gustaf never would be unkind to gulls; they were of the sea.

Norman's resentment chilled as the door of the house slammed. Its hemlock panel shut him out with a curt finality. Not from his father . . . so long as the winds blew and the lake rolled his father would be near him. But that other gentler memory, the memory of his black-eyed mother, seemed now to be imprisoned hopelessly within the walls.

He pulled the collar of his jacket up around his neck. His father's words echoed after him down the sandy road.

"The lazy, pokin', landlubberin' lights!"

He might have known his father would call them that. What land duty wouldn't old Gustaf consider lazy? He would die unhappy, if he didn't take his last breath in a storm. Of course his father was brave . . . that was part of his father. Like wanting to go out in a gale to-day. Brave and foolhardy. Even Jim Nelson knew Gustaf to be foolhardy, called him so and liked

him for it. People expected foolhardiness in an Erickson. They expected all men on the coast to stand unafraid against lake and wind and weather. That was right. It was part of a sand-blown creed . . . nothing to be proud of, nothing to talk about. To be brave was commonplace in Madrid. Everybody was brave, the women as well as the men. Didn't the women smile, fair weather or dirty, knowing all along that some day the lake would make half of them widows? Hadn't his own mother smiled . . . well, not often, but as frequently as her inland blood would permit? All old men were incautious, all young men were daredevils. All but him!

"Coward!" old Gustaf had called him. Not a sailor on the coast would have gone out needlessly into that storm to-day. The struggle would have killed old Gustaf. But because his son forbade it, he called him afraid.

Well, was he? It was not fear of drowning that troubled him. He had seen death lay a wet hand on that shore more than once. He could die by water if he had to. But how would he act while doing it? Like a clawing, spitting cat, hair up all over his head? It had not been fear kept him ashore to-day. No, in spite of all Gustaf had said!

But fear might keep him in some other day. He had never been tested in a gale. The winds howled at him now, taunting him with their cries, cries that shaped themselves into words, words that formed phrases, brutal phrases from the story of the schooner *Gottland*.

"It was a good dog. Big. Hairy all over. We felt sorry that dog was lost. But the woman? She give nobody enough to eat!"

Gustaf would never forget how his son had bawled like a baby over that yarn and run to his mother to be

comforted. Neither would his son forget! Only last night in the wind its savage words had come back to him.

He left the main road after a stout fifteen miles and bent with a climbing path among low hillocks up to the open sand-dunes. The wind had slackened. His legs sank ankle deep in the drifts. Sand lay in wind-blown ripples, in an arid imitation of the sea. From the top of the last dune he looked down on the flouncing lake, on the slender tower of Blind Man's Eye, on the squat roofs of the boat sheds and houses of the near-by coast guard station. The shore swung out in a broad clean arc, baring stony teeth along the wash. Norman made out the figures of men in the surf, sliding a lifeboat up to land. He saw a tug wallowing on Blind Man's Reef.

Sprawling in sand, he dived down to the beach. The coast guard had just made a rescue. Out on the vein of rocks a little vessel had abandoned her struggle against the contentious northwest winds, rolled on her side, and poked up her rusty red propeller and her broken rudder. Norman's eyes hardened. Another wreck, eh? Her shattered planks would wash ashore in a few days . . . rails, flat white sections of the wheel-house, bits of cordage . . . and that would be all of that!

He lagged a few minutes there in the sand near the gun and breeches buoy. A half dozen women were serving coffee to the wet winded men from the station. Norman watched them, big stalwart women in oilskins, two who were not so staunch, huddled in the shelter of a boat-house. They were the wives of surfmen, he supposed. All of them, staunch and frail alike, were facing the lake; all of them bore in their eyes that tired, hard, inscrutable expression, almost a squint, that comes from looking straight into the face of everlasting winds, year after blowy year.

He trudged up the wash to the lighthouse, a quarter-mile beyond the coast guard station. It was nearly six o'clock by his watch. The wind was dying, dying a surly and unwilling death. It would blow itself out to-night. And to-morrow his father probably would lift his nets. Norman's eyes grew bitter again for a moment; immediately softened to their pale, kindly blue . . . he must write Julie Richaud that he had come to Blind Man's Eye.

There were three buildings on the lighthouse reservation. The light tower itself grew upward out of rocks, directly at the edge of the water. It was of frame construction, bulky at the base, rising to a sharp spare pillar topped by the lamp compartment. The keeper's house, of yellow sun-dried brick under a slate roof, stood staunchly on the sand, forty yards away. A long, fat, black stocking blew from its weather-vane. A hundred paces to the north a small square one-story brick box with a top-heavy lid of stacks and whistles sheltered the apparatus of the fog signal.

He knocked on the house door. It was opened by a tall, brown-haired young woman who looked at him with lively interest.

"Erickson's my name," Norman said. "I'm assigned here."

"Come in," she invited.

She led him through a short hall.

"In there," she directed, and left him at once.

The room Norman entered was the kitchen. White, glistening, with scrubbed boards and painted woodwork, the black stove radiant with polish, windows sparkling, brass lamps gleaming in a straight row on the table. . . . Norman drew a long breath of satisfaction. He was like his father in his feeling of comfort in this kind of room. At the table, scratching his forehead meditatively with the end of a penholder, a tidy stack

of note-books and documents before him, sat a small fat old man with scant curly hair, a nose like a cluster of ripe raspberries, a little round mouth and little round eyes that blinked through little round spectacles.

"Eh?" he addressed Norman. "Who are you?"

Norman explained, with unusual clearness of tongue. The fat man arose. He proved to be short-legged when he stood up. The bald spot on his head did not come to Norman's shoulder.

"Erickson?" he repeated. "Eh? Well, well, that's a good water-proof name. I like the name Erickson. Assistant who just left was named Frank Jones. Can't tell much about the name Jones. Erickson's better. Mine's Stocking. Capt'n Sam'l Stocking. Capt'n Sam'l Stocking o' Lake Huron."

Norman shook hands gravely. So that explained the sock flying from the weather-vane! The keeper danced rather than walked about the room, dragging up a chair, stacking the papers on the table.

"Superintendent wrote he was sending a man," he commented. "Didn't say who. Didn't say when he'd get here. Hoped it'd be soon. Don't like to be alone. . . ."

"I'm a night earlier than instructions," said Norman.

Captain Stocking did not wait to hear him.

"Jones went this morning, come sunup. Going to get married. Got a nice hard job in a store somewhere. Nothing I had would hold him, not a' eight-inch cable. Didn't like to see him go. No telling ever what'll happen, and the wreck and all . . ." he danced to the window. "What's latest on that wreck?"

He talked fast, with gulps between his words, as if his breath were short. His hands, which showed knotty veins through lumps of fat, waved violently with each gulp.

"Everybody's off," Norman answered. "The tug . . . it was a tug?"

"Aye!"

"She's slid down behind the reef. There's only a spar and the end of the stack showing. I didn't see any of her crew, must of all been drying off inside the station."

"They're tired. Dog tired, I say! So's the coast guardsmen. I was first to sight her, just at daylight. Helpless. Broken shaft. I guessed it right away. I called Susan, she's my girl. You met Susan? Hey, Susan, ahoy there, Sue!" He pitched his voice to a cheery bellow.

"Ahoy yourself!" his daughter answered.

She appeared immediately. She was too tall, much taller than her father, but in spite of that she gave a quick jaunty impression. She was still plainly interested in what the new assistant looked like. She stared at him frankly. There was a slight squint about her eyes, the same inscrutable expression that Norman had seen on the faces of the women down the beach, of the women in Madrid. Without being told he knew that she had looked on many waters, matched her emotions against the seas and admitted the seas victors.

"Meet the girl," Captain Stocking cried. "Sue, this is Erickson, the new assistant. Got here in time for supper, if we ever have supper. Steve brought that fish yet?"

"Not yet."

"What's ailing him? Do we eat at midnight in this vessel?"

"He's coming up the beach now," the girl said. "I'll cook it soon as he gets here."

Her voice was unlike her father's, unlike any woman's voice Norman had known except Julie Richaud's. It was as smooth as Julie's but not so excited. She was surer of herself than Julie.

Captain Stocking sprang back to Norman.

"I was telling Erickson 'bout the wreck. I told you I called Sue? Well, she tried to phone first, tried to phone the life-saving station. Coast guard they calls it since the gover'ment took to spoiling it. Couldn't get 'em on the phone, wind had took our line down. She ran over finally and told 'em. *They* hadn't seen it. And they had the devil of a time, pardon the word, but they got the crew off. Drenched, they was. Three men. The captain's broke his leg, the tugboat captain. A terrible man for language. And at his age! Older than me. A swearer . . . ah, you should have heard him! He fit like a bobcat against takin' off, wouldn't come first trip . . . they had to go back after him . . . ."

A man's footsteps in the hallway broke off his recital. He entered solidly in rubber boots. He wore a yellow slicker and sou'wester, now wet with spray, and he smelled of fish. He was about twenty-five perhaps, round-shouldered with a burnt orange complexion and watery eyes. Captain Stocking seemed glad to see him.

"Make you acquainted with Erickson, Steve . . . Erickson, the new assistant . . . Sutton, our nearest neighbor. That's his shack, right north along the shore there . . . see it from the winder. There's his fish boat drawed up. Where you been with that fish, Steve? What time you think we eat supper?"

"I was busy. Been fittin' some new poles in my dock, storm pushed 'em out."

Captain Stocking grunted.

"Well, come in, set, stay for supper. Does a man good, a bit o' woman cookin' in betweens. Erickson here says as the tug's slidin' off'n the reef. They's five fathom o' water there. Mean job o' salvagin'."

Sue Stocking crossed to the stove, rattled pans and turned, her hands covered with flour.

"What time is it, dad?" she asked.

Captain Stocking danced his spectacles off the end of his little nose.

"Time?" he cried. "By hoky poky! Whyn't you tell me what time it was? We got just twenty minutes 'fore light ought to show!" He reached for his hat. "Best climb up to the tower, you new fellow. Start getting your instructions. Want to come along, Steve? No? Well, you know all about lighthouses. Funny to me you don't get a job keepin' one. Got matches, Erickson?"

They followed a plank walk to the rocks. The door to the light tower was astoundingly narrow, as if the government had built it economically for thin men only. Captain Stocking, puffing, sputtering, spitting out odd bits of conversation, led the way rapidly into a dark room and lighted a bracket lamp upon the wall. Three small windows, high in the sides, let in straggling beams of sunset. The apartment was empty, with the positive and active emptiness of an official anteroom. In one corner a stair, unusually steep, arose through the ceiling.

The keeper lighted the way with a shining brass lantern that he took from a wall cupboard by the door. At the ceiling the stair turned a square corner. Other small windows shone duskily far above. The angular outline of steps lifted into the air, converging toward the top.

"Never mind countin'!" Captain Stocking grunted. "They's ninety-one."

"Ninety-one?"

"Steps."

He pushed open a trap-door. Norman followed him into a snug white-painted room with black trim upon doors and casements, resembling the chart room of a vessel. A table spread under a square window on the lakeward side. Upon it rested an orderly assortment of brass lamps, tubes, gages, aluminum containers.

"The lamp room, when we burnt oil wicks," Stocking explained. "Use it for spare parts now we got the new generating lamp. Them gages there, you got to watch them, keep the kerosene reservoir filled for the lamp . . . here, I'll show you now. We got five minutes 'fore official sundown."

On the wall a ship's chronometer ticked with melancholy precision. Lockers ranged three sides. In the center a circular iron staircase wriggled up to a round hole in the ceiling, through which protruded an iron ladder that vanished perpendicularly above. Talking in gulps, pointing his knobby fat hands, Captain Stocking explained the oil pipes, the gages, every daily exacting process.

"It's a good berth here at the Eye," he concluded, "I find it a good berth. I like a fixed light. I like 'em white, too. They's a lot of bother, those revolvin' and flashin' lights. I had one once . . . up to Bois Blanc." He pronounced it "Bob Below." "This ain't as high as some, either. You're half-way to heaven, seems, going up some lights I've tended. There's Spectacle Reef in Huron. Know her? Ninety-three foot. Don't know her? Well, I was assistant there three seasons, first I come in the service. Nigh ten year ago that was. Lost my schooner two winters before that off Detour."

He climbed ahead up the ladder, talking, kicking out his heels. Above, in the lantern case itself, Norman saw his owlish little chief open a brass-bound door in the rear of a great lens, saw the flare of a glorified bonfire in the thick reflecting glass, heard the sputter of vapor, and Blind Man's Eye swallowed up the world in its glare of light.

Stocking laughed.

"You're new," he said, "else you wouldn't look so close. It's turrible mean on the eyesight. I knowed a

keeper as went blind once. He served on Wolf Trap Spit. His eyes turnt to stone, jest from lookin' too hard."

He led the way down.

"Not so high, and they's lots of 'em that's lonesomer," he continued cheerfully. "There's a visibility of sixteen miles here out of Blind Man's Eye . . . not so bad, eh? They's not one . . . and, boy, I've seen my share . . . they's not one has got a better lens. Ten thousand dollars ours is worth, if a copper. Ten thousand."

Norman thought that his duties would be simple. A fixed white light, Captain Stocking again assured him, lacked all the annoyances of the huge clockwork mechanism of the revolving and flashing beacons. The lamp must be cleaned each day, the tower steps scrubbed, brass shined, lenses polished, the oil tank filled and charged, a day and night look-out kept for fogs and thick weather; and whenever a mist obscured the horizon the fires must be touched off under the boilers in the signal house, to make steam and set the automatic fog whistle blowing. Alternate days would be free of responsibility. The night watch he would divide with Captain Stocking.

He learned more of his master at the late supper. Captain Stocking resumed his tale of the wreck of the tugboat, still breathless, waving his fork. He sparred occasionally with his daughter Susan. It developed that she too liked to talk.

"Captain Parish . . . he's captain of the life-savin' station," the keeper explained to Norman, "the life-savin' station which they call the coast guard now it's under the navy, and precious little good the navy is, monkeying in business they don't know anything about . . . well, Captain Parish tries four times to launch the boat. Now in the old days, when they was

surf-boats . . . you're old enough to remember them surf-boats? . . . well, they'd of got out in five minutes with good men at the oars. But no! Engines! Gasoline! And it's two hours before they gets her launched. . . ."

"Couldn't of made it at all with oars," Steve Sutton put in.

"Couldn't, eh?" Captain Stocking flared. "Couldn't? No, maybe not, with the boys that's took up the sailing business these days. Lor', when I was young we'd of rowed acrost a volcano and every man swearin' his face off!"

"They rescued the crew," said Susan, "and that's all that was needed."

"Rescued the crew? Of course they did! And what the devil else? There I go again with language! This day's been ag'in' me, Erickson, with all its goings-on. Such talk as I've used! And this morning I felt like prayin'. I ain't a prayin' man either, but if you'd seen that tug!"

"More fish, father?" asked Susan.

"Aye." He helped himself generously. "Well, they gets off the crew and that swearin' captain finally, but there's the tug, like I said, 'bout ready to slide down in five fathom. All under by now I reckon. The ice'll push her up the beach next winter. That'll make forty-one as I know of. Forty-one wrecks on Blind Man's Teeth. And the old Eye up above winkin' at them all the time. Where you sailed, Erickson?"

He asked the question suddenly, his knife and fork pointing sidewise like the hands of a weather-vane. Norman saw Susan and Steve Sutton both turn their eyes toward him inquiringly.

"Out of Madrid Bay," he answered, "fished a little with my dad."

"Madrid Bay, eh? Well, there's good sailors out o'

that port. Madrid Bay fishermen's the best on the lakes."

"Where do I come in?" Steve Sutton demanded.

Norman looked at him appraisingly. He did not know exactly what to make of this man Sutton. He ate steadily, with the appetite of good health. But he seemed sulky to Norman. Before her father could answer, Sue spoke.

"I know two or three men from Madrid," she said, and looked at Norman critically, as if she were comparing him with them.

Norman flushed. His feelings still were sore from his father's berating. He was glad when Captain Stocking shifted back to the wreck. Time enough to tell them of the manner in which he left Madrid Bay. . . .

The keeper and his new assistant repeated their climb to the light tower as soon as supper was eaten. The wind had dropped with the sun. A pink western sky promised a fair night. The lake still grumbled, heaved and twisted into rollers, thumped the rocks. But its temper was ebbing fast; in an hour there would remain only the even swell, the sullen uneasiness that follows storm.

"And now you've seen the light, I've something else to show," Captain Stocking said.

Back in the parlor, holding a brass lamp by a flannel cloth in order not to leave his thumb print on it, he pointed to a faded photograph on the wall. Its old walnut frame was of an artistic school sometimes called rustic, fashioned tenderly into a bulky likeness of a stack of cordwood.

"There's the *Susan*," the keeper explained proudly, "named for Sue's maw. What you think of a schooner like that?" He waited for Norman to exclaim. "Aye, I sailed a bit in my time. I was wildish like till Sue's maw giv' me redemption. I tried everything afore

that . . . here, there, square riggers, Dutchmen on the Short Seas, wool out of Sydney to the Mersey, a five-stick schooner. I was second officer for a spell on that five-sticker, sailing out of Halifax. Then the lakes . . . don't look sixty, do I? . . . then the lakes! Them was the days on the lakes . . . softwood just goin' out and hardwood comin' in . . . I've no notion o' the millions o' feet I run out the north ports."

"My father hauled hardwood," Norman said gravely. Having spoken, he felt self-conscious. He tried and failed, to imagine his father hearing his son praise him.

"So?" Captain Stocking puffed out his cheeks. "His own schooner? I owned this 'un. I got to be a savin' man, after I met Sue's maw and she cleaned up my tongue . . . well, this schooner went down like they all do. Know Detour Passage up Huron way? That's where it happened. December fourth at nine o'clock at night. Rudder smashed. Broke my leg that time . . . doctor was drunk . . . didn't walk for a year and a half. Where'd you say you sailed?"

Norman looked, tongue-tied, from the photograph of the Schooner *Susan* to the fat friendly face of his new master, to the alert rugged daughter with her merciless eyes, to Steve Sutton who at this moment was discovering a crack in the sole of his right rubber boot.

It was a shipshape room, a seaman's parlor. A brass lamp, salvaged from the days when coast beacons burned tubular wicks in their kerosene, shed a rich buff light over tidy furniture. The house wore an expectant attitude, as if it were entirely ready for any inspector to examine its dustless floors and glorious polish. In addition to the photograph of the Schooner *Susan,* there blazed near the stairway a chromo of an improbable lighthouse, decorated with mother of pearl, cropping out of impossible rocks, with terrifying mechanical

breakers poised over it out of a purple sea. In a bottle on the center table a delicately carved clipper ship with raking masts, lay docilely on its side.

"Where'd you sail," the captain insisted, " 'sides out of Madrid?"

"Nowheres," Norman admitted. He felt that he was not telling the whole truth. His father would have denied that he ever sailed out of Madrid. "Nowheres," he repeated.

The room was pitilessly still. Through an open window he heard the dying waves rush against the rocks. The lamp in the tower hummed like a kingdom of contented bees.

"I fished in my father's boat," Norman gulped . . . he might as well tell it all now and be done with the inquisition. "I only fished a few weeks. Don't care for fishing."

Steve Sutton abandoned the sole of his boot. Sue Stocking sat politely straight in her chair with the same baffling steady eyes. She was much more of a puzzle than Julie . . . and why? She was not shy, and Julie was, among strangers. That was partly the explanation. Still it didn't account for her altogether. Norman tried to look her in the face. She entirely overthrew his self-possession.

A recollection of Madrid Bay flashed across his mind. Of a dozen fishermen who listened no doubt to his father's story after he left. He knew that before this, to any one who would heed, Gustaf had accused him of being afraid. Once more across his memory passed that whole scene this morning. It couldn't have been just this morning when he drove Ed Baker from his father's shanty, only to be driven himself a few minutes later. Ed Baker . . . the gossip . . . he wished he had fought Ed Baker this morning. That would have been one pleasant memory of Madrid Bay.

Sue arose severely and adjusted the wick of the lamp. The two men still looked at Norman. There was surprise in the expressions of both, not hostility, only surprise. He had never sailed.

"My father is Gustaf Erickson," Norman added. "He was a sailor."

Steve Sutton shrugged and retired into his earlier abstraction. Captain Stocking let a disturbed "Well, well!" escape him at length. Then he shook his head as if the matter were much too deep for his after-supper mind, and darted toward the window.

"Wasn't that a boat?" he asked.

"Boat?" Sutton answered. "There's a bad sea still runnin'. Nobody with sense would come pokin' down here in a boat to-night. . . ."

"I can imagine a few persons with sense doing so," Susan said promptly. There was an edge to her voice. "Girls sometimes enjoy having callers." She went toward the door.

Samuel Stocking looked after her suspiciously. "This time o' evenin'?" he asked. He yawned, stretched his arms above his head and came away from the window. "It's nine o'clock," he said. "That wasn't no boat. Sue was just hopin' it was."

Sutton rose and took the keeper's place at the window. He had become nervous suddenly. He fretted, scrubbing his boots on the green carpet, ramming his hands into the pockets of his blue breeches.

Captain Stocking spoke of going to bed.

"You better take first watch to-night," he bade Norman. "Won't anything happen. Light always behaves herself proper time of storms. She knows when folks is dependin' on her. Stir me out at eight bells." He paused, observing that Norman looked puzzled. "Don't know the bells? Well, well . . . Steve, what you think of this? Here's a young man ain't sure of

the bells! Well, couldn't expect much else, growin' up on land. It's all right, I'll teach you. Eight bells is midnight. So's four o'clock, and eight to-morrow morning. Clock rings 'em every half-hour. Twelve-thirty starts it. That's one bell . . . every half-hour up to four o'clock, then begin all over. Well, well, you got lots to learn around here." He was unfastening his shoes. "Bless my soul, that *was* a boat!"

Voices sounded in the corridor, a man talking with confidence and the keeper's daughter.

The door opened. Norman felt a chilliness at the roots of his hair, felt hot suddenly, felt angry, felt beaten and ashamed. Grinning at him, by the side of Sue Stocking, who looked just as disturbingly sure of herself as ever, stood Ed Baker, bearer of tales from Madrid Bay.

CHAPTER V

COWARD!

NORMAN stared incredulously at Baker's robustious presence. There was something threatening in his assurance, in his smiling face. He stepped into the room without hesitation, as if he belonged as much to Blind Man's Eye as to the fish wharf at Madrid.

It was his assurance, his lack of hesitation that dismayed Norman, even more than the surprising fact of his physical presence. He did not belong here in Keeper Stocking's parlor. Like an emissary out of the past he came to harass Gustaf Erickson's son whose single desire was to forget the past.

Baker spoke first.

"It's you, is it?" He showed no surprise. "*You're* the new assistant? Sue didn't tell me *that!*" His voice was cool, with a sharp edge of unfriendliness. "Your old man's kind of broke up, you runnin' away from him. . . ."

"What's that?" Captain Stocking demanded. "What's that you say? Run away?" he repeated. He retied his shoes hastily, then arose, hands on his broad hips.

Baker laughed. He stood a head shorter than Norman. He wore a blue necktie over a white shirt that made his dark face look blacker than it was; his oilskins were new; his slicker still dripped with spray.

"You figger on holding on to this boy?" he asked Captain Stocking.

The captain coughed, and glanced at Susan.

"Aye. Assistant keeper. And what about it?"

"Leave him tell you," Baker suggested.

"There's nothing to tell, sir!" Norman spoke sharply. His voice was louder than he intended.

"Of course," Baker said, "that depends on how you look at it. He quit his old man to-day when the old man was needin' him. . . ."

"That's a lie, Baker!"

"Tut, tut!" Captain Stocking admonished. He looked reprovingly from Baker to his new assistant.

Baker lighted a cigarette. He seemed wholly undisturbed.

"This is Gustaf Erickson's son," he said. He addressed Captain Stocking. "Gustaf's a fisherman down at Madrid. His boy run out on him early this morning. The old man nigh had a stroke. . . .

"He'd have had one for sure if I'd stayed, Baker!" Norman shouted. "He put me out! I've never run . . ."

"That depends on how you look at it," Baker repeated. "Gustaf's been sick," he explained to Captain Stocking. "He asked this deep-divin' mariner to take him out to the banks to-day. He needed to lift his nets. The boy wouldn't go. His old man's all broke up to-night. Says this fellow's always been a cargo of trouble. Always been scart o' the water. . . ."

"Well, well, well!" Captain Stocking murmured.

"Baker, you're a liar! And a thief! And a . . ."

"Here, here!" Stocking interrupted. "None o' such talk goes aboard my light."

Baker laughed again. His eyes glowed unpleasantly. Sue Stocking, who had been listening in silence, glanced from him to the new assistant keeper. Norman's pale blue eyes were filled with anger but she saw no fear in them.

"Let's get this straight," she said. "If this boy's not going to fit we'd better know it now. What's this about always being afraid of water?"

"Nothing!" Norman again spoke sharply. "My father . . . was unreasonable. Going out in that storm would have killed him to-day. No one went out!" His voice raised. "*You* didn't go out!" he challenged Baker.

"*I* didn't have any nets set," the other answered lightly. "And it's not *me* calling you scared. All I'm tellin' these folks is what your old man says. He ought to know. He says you was no son to him. Says you had the green scares at goin' out in a bit of breeze. . . .

"A bit of breeze?" put in Steve Sutton. "I'll say it was a bit!"

Baker ignored him.

"You never was hankering to go afloat was you, Norm?" he asked.

"No," Norman answered slowly, "no, I never was. And I'm not now. Most thing I'm hankering for now is to see how much punishment you can take and come through alive. . . ." He moved forward.

"Sit down, Erickson!" Captain Stocking commanded. "Idee o' such talk and such goin's-on! Sit down, I tell you! I'm master here!"

Norman's temper cooled.

Again Baker laughed.

"He don't really mean it," he said.

"It's a shameful tongue in all your heads!" Stocking interrupted. "On my light!"

Norman struggled to explain. "I can't . . . can't tell all that's happened, Captain Stocking. My father is better off when I'm not there. He ordered me away . . . meant it!" He fought for words. His legs and feet were numb. He felt the girl's merciless

eyes staring at the back of his head. "He'd have sunk the boat if he'd gone out in that blow this morning. . . ."

"You wouldn't leave him sink you, Norman, would you?" asked Baker. "You're a sailor, eh? The hardest sailin' storm chaser on the lake mebbe? If you are, your old man don't guess it! He says you got the scare, and he's sailed a bit, seen a bit, in his time."

Baker turned to Susan. "It was you I came to see," he said. "Didn't figger on meeting this tadpole."

Norman started to follow the two out of the door. It was Captain Stocking's short "Here, you!" that halted him. Through the window he heard Baker's voice, talking confidentially. It moved off in the darkness toward the water.

Steve Sutton arose from his chair.

"I don't like that dogfish!" he complained.

"Don't like him?" the keeper demanded. "What of it? Guess he don't like you. What of that? The lakes is full of don't-likes." He turned on Norman. "What was his meaning about you and your paw?"

"Nothing much." Norman wet his lips. It was difficult to explain. How could he make this old sailor understand any more than he had his father? They all thought alike, talked incessantly of schooners out of Sydney, wrecks off Newfoundland, hardwood, softwood, this storm and that. Again, desperately, he wet his lips. "I wasn't aiming to be a fisherman," he said. "My father is stubborn sometimes. He wanted me to fish along with him."

"And you got an appointment here instead?"

Norman shook his head gloomily. "Not exactly. I got it. But I wasn't intending to keep it."

"Not intending to keep it?" Captain Stocking removed his spectacles angrily. "What kind of monkey shine was that? You think this lighthouse business is a game?"

"No, sir. I was going to send it back regular. I still wanted to join up with the lights. I wanted to come here. Only I saw I ought to fish. I was all fixed in my mind to go partners. To-day he put me out. There wasn't any mistaking what he meant." The clock ticked twice. "I don't like fishing . . ." he paused lamely.

"Don't like fishing? Why not? Why wasn't you for goin' partners? Why your paw put you out?"

Captain Stocking had taken off his blue uniform coat and stood in his shirt-sleeves, his lips pursed out like a fat public inquisitor. His collar hung away from his broad throat showing a brown skin and a quick play of muscles. His eyebrows arched up giving him an owlish inquiring expression. Steve Sutton interrupted.

"I never did lay stock in that Baker!"

"It don't matter what you lay stock in," the keeper answered. "I got more to say to Erickson. I want to know what else Baker was aiming at. Have you got the name of coward down at Madrid? If so, it's best you quit this service afore you start. I don't see"—he scratched his head—"you look as if you had the makings of a good man in you. Best go to sea for a spell if you have. You're how old . . . twenty-one? My lor' . . . pardon the expression . . . I'd been to sea four years when I was twenty-one. Well, well, well . . . twenty-one years old! You ain't very young but you got time still. There's old hookers left, out o' north peninsula and Superior ports. You best sail, understand? Then if you got the stuff in you, come back to this service. It's honorable service, Erickson. No place for fear. We're old seamen in it mostly, skippers and mates of the sailing days. Good men!"

"I'm not afraid!"

"Tut, tut! It don't do any good to show temper. Sue's maw learnt me that . . . 'Anchor down that tongue,' she tells me."

"I'm not afraid! I'm not here to be preached at! I'm not here to have you or Baker or anybody else yelling down my throat! I'll thrash Baker this time! I'll . . ."

"Stead-d-dy!"

"Can't a man work at what he pleases? Can't he drive a delivery wagon if he wants to? Or farm if he's a mind to farm? Does every man in the world have to go to sea? You went because you liked it, didn't you? Well, I don't like it. I'll like this. I've always wanted to work on the lights . . . on this light! I didn't desert my father, I was aiming to stay with him . . ." he paused for breath.

"It's Baker," Sutton put in. "He's always makin' trouble, always hollerin' at somebody. Called me a beachcomber the other day!" He jerked his slicker down from its peg in the corridor. "I can't come up here no more 'thout seein' him. As long as he hangs around these moorin's, they's plenty o' other places for me. Good night, Captain Sam'l. Good night, Erickson."

He stamped down the steps and across the sand. Captain Stocking turned distractedly to Norman.

"You've never sailed *any*where?" he asked.

Norman shook his head firmly. Captain Stocking was shaking his also as he went to the door. He opened it for his daughter and Baker.

"Was that the brave boy running?" Baker asked. "No? Still here? Must have been nice Mr. Sutton leaving us then. What you sweating about, Norman? I don't mind seeing you sweat!"

Sue Stocking took off her scarf, with her shoulders severely straight, and hung it deliberately in a coat closet. Her cheeks were flushed, either from the wind or some hasty emotion. At least the wind had blown awry her hair.

"Ed's set me right about this Erickson," she told her father bluntly. She paid no attention to Norman. From her detached manner he might not have been in the room. "He's got the name of an unspeakable coward up at Madrid Bay."

"Coward? Come, come, Susan!"

The girl went on heatedly. "The superintendent down at Milwaukee didn't know it. He'd not have appointed him."

Baker was smiling, a grim, self-satisfied smile. He unfastened the strap of his sou'wester from a button on his slicker where it had hung.

"I'd best be going," he decided, "it's getting late." He turned familiarly to Susan. "I'll run down next Thursday evenin' if the weather's decent. We can take a bit of ride out Battle Ax way . . . what you think?"

"Yes," Sue answered, "that would be all right." She held out her hand.

Captain Stocking nodded abstractedly. Norman's face was hard. He felt a boiling rage in his throat.

"I'll tell the boys you're safe," Baker taunted, and opened the door.

Norman stepped after him. It seemed that his legs had grown astoundingly long in the last few minutes. He must put down his boot toes carefully on the floor for fear of missing it. His right eye twitched, for some reason or other. He made himself speak.

"Hold on, Ed," he called out. "I want a word with you."

His voice sounded flat to his sensitive ears. How his throat hurt! What a cast-iron image this girl looked! How astonished the captain, like a fidgety old woman! So he wanted only good men in the lighthouse service?

The hallway was dark. Out upon the sandy waste that ran down to the rocks of Blind Man's Teeth, the

lighthouse cast a warm illumination. The tips of the few cedar trees on the landward side stood in the direct ray of the light, a brilliant poisonous green. Moths battered out their unthinking heads against the plates of glass in the lantern. The light hummed a contented monotone.

"You're not aiming to hinder my going?" Baker asked. He waited carelessly at the foot of the step. "Make it fast if you are! I've got better things to do than to wait around for you. If you've something to say, say it walking. . . ."

In the parlor of the lighthouse Captain Stocking took off his spectacles, wiped them vigorously upon a piece of chamois that he wore fastened through a suspender button, and propped them back on his raspberry nose. Sue relaxed.

"A coward, dad. I guess that fixes him. And I thought I liked him."

Captain Stocking walked the floor.

"Looks bad," he agreed. "But maybe he ain't really scared. Maybe he can't help it if he is. Once you get scart of water, you always carry it, like a black cat on the shoulders. Funny about young men not choosin' to sail these days. Ed Baker was a little choppy, don't you think?"

His daughter patted his shoulder. "For a very flattering reason," she said. "Who do you think he's trying to impress around here, Skipper? You? Of course he was choppy. All men are except you. There's Steve. A fair fellow, Steve. But always snapping about Ed. And Ed about Steve. Now it will be the two of them against Erickson until they get rid of him."

"Rid of him?" Samuel Stocking took off his glasses as if by so doing he could see her better. He had lived a hearty life with hearty men afloat and ashore. He had heard cowards applauded for their fearlessness, had

heard fearless men called cowards. "Oh no," he argued, "nobody's settin' out to get rid of him . . . that ain't Christian. Give the lad a chanct, Sue. I ain't holdin' up for him, understand. No, I like my men pulled out the lake and salted down. They last better that way. But get both ends of this case. I've heard sea lawyers make scoundrels out'n good lads afore now. . . ."

He stopped and they both listened. Voices were arguing on the beach. The wind blew their words toward the house.

"What did you ever do?" Baker cried once. Then Norman Erickson's voice, on fire with anger:

"I'll drown you deeper'n a lost anchor, Ed Baker, if there's any more!"

Their voices flared up a second time and then died away completely. Father and daughter waited nervously. The new assistant was breathing hard when he reentered the room. Perspiration flattened the hair to his long, blond head. His blue eyes flashed with a chill animosity. He ignored Sue.

"I'm to call you at midnight, sir?" he asked Captain Stocking.

"Yes . . . no . . . wait a minute, Erickson. Things is upset to-night. It's after ten now. We better make just two even watches of it to-night. Turn me out at three bells . . . half past one. I'll take till morning. I don't need much sleep."

Sue wound the clock. Captain Stocking pursed his lips reflectively. He chose to ignore the scene just over.

"No old man needs much sleep," he repeated loquaciously. "In my young days, my wicked days, I needed sleep I tell you. Up carousin' around all night, sleep all day. Sue's maw set me right. She cleaned out my mouth. Always hangin' a kedge anchor on my coat-tail, she was. Wouldn't let Capt'n Sam'l Stocking say his say till he'd thought it over. She saved me. 'Course,

I forgets myself sometimes . . . you'll hear me . . . and let some hot words clutter my tongue. But not often, eh, Sue? Not often!"

She disregarded his question. "Ed must be having trouble starting his boat," she said. "I haven't heard the engine . . ."

"He's pumping her," Captain Stocking suggested.

"He's not pumping. She's dry. We looked at her. He pulled her up on the sand to-night, couldn't leave her at the dock with such a sea running."

"I can take the watch, sir," Norman repeated, "if you want to turn in."

Sue went to the window. Norman, eying her, saw a suspicious hardness cover her face. He left the room, ill at ease, and on the step outside the front door stared up soberly at the light.

It burned steadily. Its reflection made hunched, clownish shadows on the wreckage along the rocks. A quarter-mile to the south the single dim light of the coast guard station burned sleepily. Straight ahead, fourteen miles across the black secretive waters of the lake, Battle Ax light pricked the darkness with a ruddy, revolving spark.

Sue Stocking came out of the door behind him.

"I'm going down and see what's holding Ed," she said determinedly, "if neither of you *men*," she spoke the word clearly and repeated it with contempt, "if neither of you *men* care to help him." She ran down the steps, brushing Norman's coat sleeve. He watched her uncertainly as she turned to the right around the house. He was tempted to follow.

She was gone perhaps a minute. And then her voice sounded up from the wash, breathless, as if she were frightened.

"Ed!" she called.

Captain Stocking, who had succeeded this time in

getting off his shoes, padded to the door in his socks. His plump face was red with perspiration. Norman made room for him to pass, then followed him. Unconsciously they started together toward the beach.

"Father!" they heard Sue cry. There was no doubt about it this time. She wanted help.

Norman raced through the sand. He heard Captain Stocking pant like a winded dog at his heels. With the glare of the tower behind him, he made out the dim green starboard side lamp on Ed Baker's boat.

Sue Stocking was kneeling in the wet pebbles, trying to lift a man. Norman leaned down, with a sick feeling in his stomach, and turned the fellow over. It was Baker all right . . . Baker with blood on his flat features and his mouth partly open, showing his teeth.

"I think he's dead," Sue said harshly.

Norman caught his breath. This matter concerned him someway. In the moment's panic he could not tell to just what extent.

"Pick him up, you two, carry him in," Sue said. "Hurry, if you know how!"

She ran ahead.

Baker was a heavy man for all his shortness of stature. Norman's eyes clouded so that he could not see as he lifted him in his arms. He swayed a moment in the gluey sand then turned obediently toward the door of the keeper's house. Captain Stocking puffed beside him.

"Ah, the wickedness!" he was crying. "Somebody's soul is running close to the rocks! Murder!" He repeated the word. "Sam'l Stocking sailing head on into a murder!"

They reached the house door. Sue waited in the parlor, a basin of water dripping in her hands; her face was white but all the tumult was gone from it.

"Put him down here on the couch. Bring the lamp."

"He's breathing all right," Norman said roughly. "Feel him breathing against me. There, something under his head. Don't cry."

"I never cry," said Sue Stocking.

He arose weakly and looked at her. There was blood streaking his sleeve and the front of his coat. He tried to rub it off.

"Hit in the back of the head," Captain Stocking whispered.

Father and daughter turned slowly, as if a mechanical belt were twisting them. They looked accusingly at Norman. Sue's eyes were merciless. For a terrible moment he gave them stare for stare; then gulped and cried out:

"You don't think *I* did it?" He caught himself. "Better get a doctor," he said dully, "reach McCarthy on the phone."

Captain Stocking shook his head.

"Wind took our line down last night. There's one over at the coast guard. Captain Parish'll call him. . . ."

"I'll run," Norman promised.

He was glad to be out of the room, out of the pressence of Ed Baker's flat bloody face, out of the range of Sue Stocking's eyes. Running was easy on the wash where the sand was packed firm. He arrived at the coast guard station just as the watch in the tower sounded six bells. The look-out awakened the captain. While Norman waited, Captain Parish telephoned Copperhead.

"One o' my patrol will meet you at the main road," Norman heard him instruct Doctor McCarthy. "There's a man hurt at the lighthouse . . . don't know how . . . don't know any more at all. You'll start right away?"

He came from the telephone.

"Blood?" he asked, pointing at Norman's jacket.

"Yes, blood. I carried him."

"Fix a lantern, Anderson," Captain Parish bade the look-out. "I'll go along back with this assistant."

He returned immediately in oilskins and boots. Before he buttoned the slicker he took pains to fasten a stiff collar on his shirtband, and snapped a ready knotted tie in place. He wore a blue knit cap instead of the sou'wester of the coast. He was a tall and big-boned individual with a rackety cough, a face like a meat cleaver, and a mermaid tattooed on the back of his right hand; a brittle briny figure of that type which leaps directly from boyhood to middle age and clings there, stubbornly refusing to grow old.

Norman walked silently beside him, giving no particulars. In the parlor of the lighthouse Captain Stocking waited restlessly. Sue stood at the foot of the couch stiff as a tamarack spar. She had attempted to bind the wound on Ed Baker's head but blood already was soaking through the cloth. The fisherman was conscious, his eyes were wide open.

"Evenin', Josiah," Samuel Stocking greeted the coast guard captain.

"Evenin', Sam'l," Captain Parish answered. "What's it about?"

"About?" Ed Baker muttered. "I can tell ye!" He moved his head slowly, and lifted one hand, pointing a thick, stubby, shaking finger at Norman.

"I was getting in my boat," he cried. "Erickson hit me behind. He'd said he was goin' to drown me. . . ."

He closed his eyes and lay still. Norman stared unbelievingly at him. He felt dizzy suddenly. The room was stuffy. He must have air. He staggered toward the door, gripped at the table, pulled off its scarf, and slid into Captain Stocking's rocking chair. He heard Sue Stocking speak sharply:

"You disgusting coward!"

CHAPTER VI

FIRE!

NORMAN awakened, the morning after Ed Baker was hurt, with a sense that he had drowned in his boots to a cold fifty fathoms. Only his head had been saved. And that ached. It was cheerless as death in the assistant keeper's quarters. He had slept three hours. Without the windows a discouraged five o'clock June sun tried, and failed, to rise through a dun half light.

An unheroic morning. One of those days when the Michigan coast lacks its splendor of accomplishment. Night pared off its crust; there remained only grayness underneath. The few trees around Blind Man's Eye lighthouse bent dripping branches through a wet mist. The shore lost its shape, the horizon fogged, beach grasses sagged under heavy drops of dew . . . a morning that sets a scowl on a man's face, casts a shade across his niggling business.

Norman's first morning as assistant at Blind Man's Eye!

Doctor McCarthy, puffing on foot from the main road through sand that blocked his car wheels, had come and gone before one o'clock.

"Not a bad cut," he had said, after examining Baker's head, "only a bit of a clout. How'd you get it?"

Baker growled and no one else answered.

"You didn't need me, with Erickson here," McCarthy said.

"Erickson?" repeated Samuel Stocking.

"He can tie up a broken head, lugged and toted for his father long enough to know how . . . how long, Erickson?"

"Not long enough," Sue Stocking put in with a sharp voice.

"No?" Doctor McCarthy looked at her inquiringly. He shrugged his shoulders indifferently at whatever he saw in her expression. "You'll be all right to-morrow," he assured Baker.

Captain Stocking went to bed in his clothes for an hour after the medical man departed. Captain Parish clumped back to duty at the coast guard station.

Sue Stocking had not slept. She had changed to a severe dress of blue denim, a naval looking garment with white braid, when Norman reported in the light-house kitchen for his breakfast. She was unnaturally silent for so assertive a young woman. Norman ate two flap-jacks, drank two cups of coffee.

"More?" asked the girl.

"No more."

He left her angrily. She was trying to humiliate him, eh? Called him a coward at midnight, and next morning made no amends for it? Well, she need not. Let her be superior. He remembered that Julie Richaud had told him he was no coward. Evidence was against him. But he had work to do, a hard first day's work. Captain Stocking had turned off the lamp at official sunrise. Let the lens cool a good two hours, he had instructed Norman, then polish the glass with chamois. There was brass to shine next. There were the kerosene tanks to fill. Steps to be swept. White paint to be scrubbed. And there, still sleeping heavily on the couch in the parlor was Ed Baker to be settled!

Norman made his way toward the tower. He passed Baker's fishboat with its bow run up on the point. Already small waves had piled a bar of sand along its

port side; it would take hard pulling to get it into deep water. Three men might do it. For Ed Baker who had called him afear'd of the lake! He made a heap of trouble for one flat-faced fisherman. After all, who *did* hit him?

Norman had swept down the tower stairs and was scrubbing the white stone steps when Sue Stocking summoned him to the house. He dropped his pail and hurried. Captain Stocking and Baker were talking together earnestly in the parlor. The keeper's red forehead was covered with large drops of perspiration. He was plainly uncomfortable. He scowled in the general direction of Norman and wiped his face with a blue handkerchief.

"Baker's ready to start home," he said testily. "Me and you'll have to get his boat off. If we can float it into deep water he thinks he can steer."

Baker threw down a match carelessly. The bruise had swollen on the back of his scalp. He spoke with a bluster:

"And I ain't scart to go out alone, even if my head is busted."

"Pick up that match you throwed down," Captain Stocking growled. "This is no fish shanty floor."

"I'll be ready in a minute," Norman said, "soon as I get my boots."

Using an old stick of wreckage as a lever, the keeper and his assistant pried the heavy fishboat off the sand, while Baker scowled on the beach. At last, after repeated rollings, the boat floated into open water. Captain Stocking with Norman and Baker rowed out in a skiff and caught it; its owner tumbled aboard.

"I'll turn over the engine," Norman volunteered.

"Keep your hands off my engine!"

"Good enough. Go to it."

The motor chugged, caught its breath, and started

an excited barking. The propeller turned over, churning bubbles away from the fan-tail stern. Baker climbed to the deck, set his boots down firmly on the tiller and eased it to the left. He called good-by to Captain Stocking. The keeper nodded gloomily. He rowed shoreward with the short nervous stroke of a deep-water sailor aboard a small boat.

"And it will look fine on the report!" he growled as he wet his feet in the wash. "Wrote out regular it will be a pretty story!"

"This business last night?"

"And nothing else!"

"Why report it?"

"Why? For the reason I've been in this service ten year, young man, ten year I tell you, and never a black mark ag'in' my name. If I was to drown this affair with Baker blabberin' to headquarters, it would bring inspectors like gulls to a cleanin' shack. It's about time for summer inspection anyway. And I want your statement, wrote neat and careful . . . and true, if it's the same to you . . . to pin to mine. Best go in the house and do it now. Sue'll get you the makings. Be thoughtful of that pen. It's the last one I got out of this year's requisition."

Norman paused.

"What's Baker going to blabber?" he demanded.

Captain Stocking kicked the sand as if he sought to find an answer in it.

"That's the question," he admitted, "now what *will* he tell? A hooker's a clipper ship, once it's a-bottom, they say. I was trying to talk sense to him there. Was you ever trying to talk to a sturgeon when it ain't interested? That's Ed Baker. . . ."

"Let him talk. I can prove it. Those weren't my tracks in the sand. Whoever hit Baker came ashore in a skiff."

"I know. Think I didn't look the ground over myself first thing this morning? That's why it's best to be provin' it to headquarters afore he starts his private fog signal squealin'. A thing's easier to prove when you got the first word and the last. Well, well . . . go get the pen. Bear down easy on it."

Sue had finished her morning's work and was reading in the parlor when Norman approached. The marks of men's sea boots had been diligently swept from the floor and the empty chairs again stood stiff and unemotional as if no quarrel in the world ever could upset their order. Norman waited uneasily in the door and then rapped. The girl turned a page deliberately. He could see the gay paper jacket with a picture of a man in white pants, some society tale. Norman had come across books like it, books about fine ladies and lazy gentlemen, the kind of city folk who hobnobbed together over on Ottowa Lake in the summer.

"Your father says give me the pen," he reported abruptly.

Sue Stocking closed the book, marking the place with a piece of net twine. She had known all along he stood there, Norman thought hotly. She crossed to the table with indifference.

"Paper?" she asked.

"Please. And ink."

She placed the materials on the table, dropped a clean blotter beside them and shut the drawer. Her face was calm this morning, placid as a harbor where no wind ever blew.

"Wait a minute," she said, "I want to talk to you."

He met her eyes cautiously, like a suspected prisoner before a judge.

"I know what you want the pen for. You're going to write your report on what happened last night. I want to talk to you first. Why'd you hit Ed Baker?"

The clock on the table rattled out an excited bell. Ten. The morning was nearly gone. After its metallic note, Norman's voice sounded shamefully hoarse.

"I didn't!" he cried. "I didn't hit any one."

She looked at his perspiring face critically. Then with a wry gesture, she turned back to her book.

"Somebody hit him," she commented suspiciously.

Norman flushed.

"*I* did not," he insisted.

She made no answer. He sat down wrathfully at the table and labored over the report. He blotted it twice; being angry, let the blots go. When he had finished, he laid it down silently and left the room. Let her believe what she wanted! There were other things to think about. He climbed up to the tower.

"The lens first," Captain Stocking said, putting him to work. "And remember, easy, easy! Ten thousand dollars it cost. A split head will mend, but these lenses . . . no mending them. The Dutchmen make this glass and they're a long way off. Here, it says on it . . . Hamburg. That's Dutch. Do it this way, an easy swipe. But the brass there, you don't need a care about that. It won't break. Swab it good."

Captain Stocking was not a driving master. He treated Norman as a superior should, a small superior commanding a small vessel. Down on his hands and knees swabbing polish that first day and the next and days thereafter, Norman could not refrain from judging old Stocking by his father. The keeper was stern. He watched like a hawk but he never bullied. It had been the bullying that sent Norman away from Madrid. Life was pleasant here at the Eye. He minded not at all the thousand particular and paltry tasks that are the everlasting duties of those who keep the lamps. And this was other people's property. Captain Stocking insisted on it.

"An' when the inspector comes he'll be asking . . ."

The assistant heard the warning a dozen times, fifty, in the first two weeks.

"When's he coming?" he inquired one morning. "When you expect him?"

"I expect him," Captain Stocking answered, "when he's least expected. It's the way of 'em. They could sneak up and catch salvation with a landin' net, most of those fellows. Some morning at sunup you'll see the tender layin' out there innocent off the point with her hook down and the inspector ashore squintin' at the grass that's growed in the night atwixt the stones in the walk. Aye, and if it ain't the grass it's a finger mark on the brass. And if it ain't a finger mark, it's the curtains on the lantern. A man's got to be educated to be an inspector! I've seen 'em a-plenty. Lor' . . . excuse me . . . but, lor', wasn't I scared time I was assistant at Spectacle Reef? My first light that was. The keeper got the pennant there that year, out the whole district he had the best kept station. You've never seen the pennant? It's a pretty sight kickin' at the monkey gaff on the tower. I've never got it yet. Think every year I'm goin' to. . . ." He scuffed down the stair talking in gulps of the devious ways of lighthouse inspectors.

Norman went on with his polishing. He had served a month with no word from Madrid Bay. He wondered about his father, usually at night. It was good weather for fishing; if old Gustaf were out he was lifting heavy hauls. Sometimes when the air was clear Norman saw to the north specks on the lake that he knew were Madrid fishing boats crawling into port like puny water spiders.

Several times, in the evening always, he heard the peculiar "chug . . . chug, chug" of Baker's engine

putting in cautiously along the reef to the lighthouse, heard Baker's heavy voice and Sue's, laughing and talking. He watched them depart for Battle Ax Island the Thursday evening after Ed was hurt. But he never encountered him face to face. Sue managed that.

Sue sailed often in the coast guard boat to Madrid. She asked him always if there was anything he needed. There was nothing . . . he had sent to the supply house in Detroit for his uniform, he had plenty of tobacco, plenty of matches, shoe polish . . . only one thing, and at first he did not mention it to her. But the second time he gave her a letter and two pennies.

"Put it in the post-office, will you please? Buy a stamp."

Susan did not look at the address until she was half across the bay. When she did, she saw that the name upon the envelope was Gustaf Erickson.

Norman had written a long letter, had torn up the first copy, and written again. He had tried to be casual. He had offered to return to Madrid if his father wanted him, and enclosed fifty dollars, half his first month's pay.

He never received a reply.

After a fortnight he wrote Jim Nelson. He folded a five-dollar bill into this envelope, instructing honest old Jim to buy Gustaf anything in the way of extras that he needed, and to send word to Blind Man's Eye if an emergency arose. Jim answered on a postal card.

"Sure," he wrote, "I'm standing by. Gus is all right. I wouldn't come back, not yet. I'm easing up his mind. I'll leave you know when to try seeing him," and that was all.

Twice on days off duty the assistant keeper walked up the sand to the coast guard station. He watched boat drill once, saw the gun practise and a surfman riding the breeches buoy from the mast set in the sand. Cap-

tain Parish neglected to recognize him the first time. The second visit he nodded, a curt businesslike salute as if his minutes were valuable and he feared Norman might waste them. His men did not speak; there seemed more to their silence than natural taciturn shyness. Norman puzzled over it. After all it was devilish lonely here at Blind Man's Eye.

Then, one hot windy morning in August, Captain Parish stuck his lean face with the blue knit cap atop it, into the tower door.

"Are ye there, Sam'l?" he called.

"Aye, Josiah."

"I got a new man, Sam'l," the coast guard captain said. "I been two short all season. I had a little time, thought I'd run in and see ye. . . ." They walked down the beach, talking.

That night at supper Samuel Stocking shared the news with his daughter.

"Cap Parish's new number seven man come this week."

"Do you know him?" asked Sue.

"Ed Baker," her father answered, and kept his eyes on his pork chop.

"Oh," said Sue, "I knew he'd been talking coast guard."

Norman's fork picked up its meat mechanically. He had no reason for flushing. What matter if ten Bakers came to the point?

"How much does he know about saving lives?" he demanded acidly.

Neither one answered him. Sue crossed composedly to the stove and brought back the coffee pot.

"Another cup?" she asked.

Norman nodded. Sue poured out the coffee and there was no further mention of the coast guard.

But Norman felt disheartened. How had Baker

managed that? And why? Had he contemplated enlistment in the life-saving service before Norman came to the lighthouse? He went outside after supper and sat moodily on the steps. The house smelled sickeningly of fresh paint, with which Sue had redecorated her bedroom. He went to bed at eight o'clock. At nine Captain Stocking, perspiring and excited, awakened him.

"Parish called," he cried, "he got a tip that the tender with inspector aboard was to Skillagallee a week come Monday. It'll be here any time. Scrub down the tower steps, first thing to-morrow."

"I scrubbed them to-day."

"And to-day ain't to-morrow, or I'm losin' my mind," Samuel Stocking answered. "Scrub 'em down first thing. See that your new uniform's pressed and your shoes blacked proper, special around the heels. Inspectors is particular as to heels."

Captain Stocking spent most of the next day leaning over the outside lantern deck with binoculars to his eyes. He fancied he saw the arriving tender in every blot of smoke, every spar, every clean funnel, every uncertain speck on the lake. The smoke developed usually into a tug with a barge of pulp wood; the spar proved to be a pleasure yacht; the funnel, rising to vision, brought with it once the jowly profile of the steamer *Missouri,* again the leaner swifter *Manitou.* The specks each time grew into fishing boats, outward bound from Madrid Bay.

Norman worked deliberately. He was curious about the inspector. But the thought uppermost in his mind was the neighboring presence of Ed Baker. Baker had some purpose in getting assignment to Blind Man's Reef. It was childish to think he had come just to plague him . . . it might be on account of Sue Stocking?

Shortly before daybreak on Friday morning, while

Norman stood watch, he sighted a vessel moving from the northwest. She carried few lights and bore off the usual track of passenger steamers and freighters. She was too large for a tug searching a log tow at Madrid Bay. He hurried into the house and stirred out Captain Stocking. It was ten minutes of four by the ship's clock. The keeper squinted through the window.

"That's her," he said and sighed relievedly. "Well, well, well . . . four o'clock of a morning. Now ain't that like inspectors?" He went into the hall and howled. "Sue, wake up, for the love o' the locks! Get into your uniform, Erickson," he cried, dancing back to him again, "and act like you never wore anything else, like you was born in it. Mind your heels. And listen . . . if you're spoke to, speak. If you ain't, keep your hatch battened. And look keen, lad, look keen. Turn off the light sunup to the second, nothing to spare one way or the other."

He thumped on his daughter's door again. "Out with ye, Sue! Do up the beds, make the kitchen shipshape!"

Norman changed to his other uniform, combed his hair and put on his new blue cap. He looked like a seaman. From old Gustaf he had inherited bone and skin and complexion and the indelible salty brand of the sea, no matter what French farm blood his mother had left him. He smoked a cigarette, dropped the stump into the sand and pressed it out of sight with his heel. In the tower he watched nervously. At the exact moment of sunup he flashed out the light, just as a trim white steam tender slowed down its speed a quarter-mile off the point.

She was a clean proper vessel in government white, some hundred feet over all, with a look of old battle pictures about her. She carried a long, beak-like prow, lacking only a figurehead to make it a clipper bowsprit.

Her graceful fantail stern, the sheer lines, the sharp rake of the two masts, the modesty of the deckhouses were strange to the lake boats Norman knew; less modern, as if she belonged to the older navy and had been converted into tender use. A businesslike cargo crane stood between the hatches amidships.

"For bringin' up supplies," Captain Stocking explained, "we'll be cartin' them in all day." His eyes searched anxiously. "That beam right there over your head, Erickson, that one . . . have you dusted it this morning? Do it, quick!"

The inspector's anchor plunked into the water, spattering up a white shower. Chain rattled in the hawse hole. A winch thumped; on the forward deck and atop the chain locker fluttered for a moment a white feather of steam. Gulls, fishing for their breakfasts among the rocks, arose in voluble protest at the intrusion. The tender's round bottomed, clinker boat slid down from the davits and three men dropped into her. Two of them hauled at the oars with a lazy swing. The third hunched over the tiller in the stern. Even at a distance the assistant keeper made out that this was an uncommonly tall man, and although the morning was not particularly chill, he was bundled in a great blue coat.

Captain Stocking grunted. "It's him," he said.

"Who?"

"The big boy hisself. Cat-eye McGoogan, chief inspector. Why'd he come? Lord-a-mercy . . . excuse me, Erickson . . . Lord-a-mercy, I hate the sight o' his sidelights!"

The chief inspector reared a head and neck taller than Captain Stocking. He was a lean Irishman, sixty years old, with arms that stuck out like yards on a mast. He walked like a seaman. Under his blue coat showed the close tight uniform of the service. It was exceedingly well pressed.

"My new assistant. He's called Erickson," said Captain Stocking.

The inspector examined Norman with one short inquisitive glance. Norman knew at once why they called him Cat-eye. His eyes were small and light in color, set close together at the sides of a long, sinuous nose; they were lost in his great broad face which was shaped like a cabbage and pitted by smallpox. It was not a fat face, merely massive, as if it had been carved out of soapstone by a drunken sailor. One expected a heavy voice from such a man, a rumbling bellow that did for talk. But when he spoke his lips barely moved. Their sound was almost womanish.

"Good morning, Erickson," he said, "how long you been here?"

"Two months, sir."

"Your first trick?"

"Yes, sir."

"You're the lad from Madrid Bay?" McGoogan put his hand, which was broad as a palm-leaf fan, into his pocket and drew out an envelope. "I've got a report on you, report on a fight. Have to look into it this time; was going to write, then thought I'd be here soon enough. Come inside, Stocking. Wait here, Erickson. I'll talk to you later."

Ten minutes passed while Norman fidgeted. That lying Baker . . . he was near forgetting the unpleasantness of that first night. He walked uncomfortably up and down the sand. Another five minutes; then Captain Stocking popped out of the house, polishing his glasses.

"Tower first?" he asked mildly.

"Tower first," agreed Cat-eye McGoogan. Norman, who was watching the inspector's eyes, concluded that they fitted his voice, and the voice misfit the rest of him. "Remember, lad, you're on probation," McGoogan said.

"The capt'n here," he waved his long right arm, "has give me a good word for you. It ain't seamanly to go bunglin' fellows in the dark, and you've the look o' salt about you. Erickson's a decent deep-water name. Capt'n says he don't think you did it. Me, I don't believe you did either. Least I don't want to believe it. We'll call it closed. Don't go fighting the coast guard. This is a decent service, need decent men. Now the tower. . . ."

Captain Stocking made a sign for Norman to follow. He walked stiff-kneed at their heels, his head humming. Decent service, eh? Well, it would have no cause to be ashamed of him.

He followed Captain Stocking and the inspector. McGoogan put on a pair of soft white cloth gloves as he entered the light tower, gripped the door knob, glanced down suspiciously at the tips of his gloves and went on without comment. All the way up the stair he rubbed his hand along the rail; each time his fingers came away white. The rail was clean, Norman knew. He had wiped it down not twenty minutes ago. But once they reached the supply room, Cat-Eye McGoogan assailed him with technique.

Norman answered carefully. The captain prompted him once, but the inspector cut him off.

"I'm doing this, Stocking," he said with a show of temper. "I know you understand lights."

"Keep her screened every day?" he asked Norman.

"Yes, sir."

"See you do. Never let the sun touch her for a minute. It would kill the lens."

He fussed for half an hour about the lamp. When he had finished he said: "It'll do," as if disappointed at discovering no fault, and tramped up to the house. Sue stood in the doorway, wearing a great, white, starched apron with sleeves. Norman had heard her

refuse when her father first told her to put it on. It was not her kind of apron. It was more like the ones his mother used to wear; it made Sue seem older than she was and much more docile. McGoogan scowled when he saw her and dropped back beside Norman.

"That your wife?" he asked.

"No, sir! That's capt'n's daughter!"

"Oh. You married?"

"No, sir."

"Think of getting married?"

"No. . . ."

"Don't!" McGoogan said, cutting short his hesitation. "No place for a woman around a lighthouse. Don't belong here no more'n they do on shipboard. Look at me. I've stayed a bachelor."

He gave Sue Stocking a thin good morning. She showed him the parlor first. Inspector McGoogan looked it over critically, sniffed the air, kicked back the green carpet and hunted for dust under it. There was none. Captain Stocking stared mildly out of the window.

"Uncommon bad for the health, dust is," the inspector said. "I see too much of it about. Not here, not here, miss. This room's neat as Noah's pantry. That table lamp, it's been polished already to-day? I've a great distaste for finger marks on a brass lamp. All right, the kitchen. You might have a pot of coffee on the stove?"

Neither Captain Stocking nor his assistant had eaten breakfast. But they did not dare admit it now. The inspector drank his coffee standing, permitting his eyes to examine the corners of the room.

"Kitchen coal holding out?" he asked.

"Been saving it close," Captain Stocking answered.

McGoogan finished the coffee and wiped his lips carefully. He looked at Sue with a little more approval.

"It's a fine brew, miss. A mite heavy perhaps for some, but an elegant brew. Now the rest of the establishment. Lead the way, Keeper. The sleeping quarters first, then the fog signal, and after that we'll talk requisitions."

Captain Stocking's bedroom, which Norman had never seen, was bare of furnishings. The keeper scorned rugs in sleeping quarters. There was a narrow bed, with two red woolen blankets folded at its foot, a table with a comb upon it, a small mirror above. An old chest stood in one corner, iron bound, with dented sides and the initials "S S" branded on its top. Cat-eye McGoogan moved to the bed, examined the sheets, felt the blankets and muttered, "Clean and dry, all right," then passed to Norman's quarters.

There were four bare rooms on the other side of the house, arranged for the assistant keeper, should he be a man of family. Norman had scrubbed the floors of his unused apartment twice the previous week. He had washed and polished the windows. He had shined the door knobs. His clothes closet hung in order. But on his table a small saucer contained the ashes and stub of a cigarette.

"Faith, and he sleeps in a room full of ashes!" cried Cat-eye McGoogan.

Captain Stocking clucked his tongue. "Oh, my!" he said.

Sue started to laugh, then checked herself, and looking impatiently at Norman, she crossed on tiptoe and picked up the saucer. Norman took it from her.

"I'll empty it myself," he said.

"Uncommon bad for the lungs, young man, sleeping in a room with ashes," Inspector McGoogan chided. "Aside from being unshipshape. This once, I'll say nothing of it."

There still remained Sue's bedroom. Norman fol-

lowed the others uncomfortably across the white hallway. He was conscious that he was due for a lesson in housekeeping from the keeper's daughter as soon as the inspector left. But McGoogan was not so terrible! He might be a great deal worse. He might find fault as old Gustaf did and have the government to back him up. He might be a sour silent fellow like Captain Parish of the coast guard. Instead he merely whispered, but meant the whispers.

Sue opened the door to her room with a proud careless gesture. A strong smell of fresh paint floated out into the hallway. Captain Stocking made a quick appraising glance and permitted the inspector to enter first.

Sue sat down in a chintz covered chair, her face entirely complacent. No dead ashes in her quarters!

The walls gleamed a fresh sea-shell pink. The floor was spotless, covered with rag rugs; the white curtains were stiff with starch. On her dressing-table a collection of glass bottles and jars, brush, comb, mirror and other pieces of ivory whose use Norman did not know, stood in military rows on a white cloth. He waited expectantly for Cat-eye McGoogan to speak. Certainly this room would find approval.

The inspector had tightened his mouth into a hard line. He was scowling all over his face.

"Shell pink!" he cried. He turned pettishly on Captain Stocking. "If that ain't the wit of a rabbit! You painted the walls the wrong color. . . ."

"I painted them!" Sue interrupted. She added a short "Sir!"

"You? Well, I might have known it. And what's a color chart for, I ask you? Think the service turns 'em out to match your frocks or something? You got a chart? Aye, you have? Well, there's plenty of colors and shades you durst use, plenty o' them. But no. You go pickin' your own kind. That shade ain't on this

year's chart, ain't on no chart this side o' Singapore. Think of marrin' up a room in a lighthouse with a color like that! Got to be done over and done quick!"

Sue stood up angrily.

"It's very near like the chart!" she threw back at him. "Near it as any paint to be had in Madrid Bay!"

"Near like it? So's green near like to blue, miss. But wouldn't I be a pretty herring if I come prancin' in here with a green uniform some fair morning and talked o' near-likes? Paint it over, I tell you. Shell pink!" He pulled an official paint chart from his pocket and handed it to her. "Nice thing to lose the pennant over," he snapped at Captain Stocking. "Sure, you had a chance to win it. Chance and leeway to spare. All's shipshape everywhere else. Tower shines like the sun. Who's been polishin' the tower?"

"The assistant," Captain Stocking answered. His voice shook, as if about to break into pieces. He cleaned his glasses nervously with his chamois. "A new-comin' lad that never has see a light afore! I've learnt him better than my own gal, Inspector."

He turned accusingly on Sue. "I ask you, Susan, why don't you say a word when you get a fool idea in your head? Your maw wouldn't 'a' used a color like that, now would she? I knowed one other woman as lost her man the pennant once . . . woman up at Skillagallee . . . keeper worked his arms off a-shinin' the brass, and what'd she do but go and paint all the window sash blue, sayin' she's got to match her curtains." He stamped his foot.

Sue Stocking looked at him indignantly.

"Skillagallee's all right this year," said McGoogan. "Give it the pennant, I shall. No woman up at Skillagallee. . . ."

"Sue's maw would never 'a' done such a thing!"

"It's the way of most women," the inspector growled, "a show of poor dee-cipline, Stocking."

He ducked back into the corridor. Captain Stocking, sweating amazingly, followed him out-of-doors. Norman looked back at Sue as he started to leave the room. She was standing at the window, her shoulders straight. He delayed until the inspector and the keeper were gone.

"I wouldn't care," he began.

"I don't," Sue answered sharply without turning around. "Go on. I don't need any comforting."

Norman left her, his saucer of ashes in his hand. He emptied it into the kitchen stove, washed the saucer at once and put it away in the cupboard. He was learning, he told himself grimly; by the time he had been six months on a light he'd be as fussy an old housekeeper as McGoogan himself.

The inspector's temper seemed relieved by the fresh air.

"Now the signal shack," he bade. "After that we'll see about the oil supply."

He found little to please him at the fog whistle, though there was nothing in particular for which he could reprove. He haggled like a pedler over requisitions, cut in half the keeper's item of soap. Norman listened with a growing distaste. He felt sorry for Captain Stocking. Inspection had gone beyond him in the row over pink paint. After all, what difference did it make what color a girl daubed the walls of her bedroom? How'd it affect ships on the lakes?

Sue did not appear again while the inspector was ashore. Norman, going into the house for his dinner while the keeper ate with McGoogan on the tender, found no sign of food and went back to work. All afternoon, with the help of two seamen from the government boat, he lugged in coal and oil, spare parts, ropes, nails, new shingles for the kitchen roof, all the supplies for the next year. Captain Stocking checked and sorted. Inspector McGoogan poked about the reservation.

His tender lifted anchor and sailed out to the open lake at five o'clock.

"And that's that!" Captain Stocking growled.

Norman kept his eyes on his work. He would not tell the keeper he was sorry; he'd tried that with Sue.

"And now you've met Cat-eye," Stocking asked, "what you think, just atween us?"

"He's strict."

"Strict?"

"Yes, sir."

"Strict!" Captain Stocking lighted a clay pipe and flung the match down unburied in the sand. "That critter ain't just strict. He's worse'n old Jeremiah himself, Erickson. Been sore all his life 'cause there's just ten commandments. What kind of disposition was that, takin' away my pennant on account the gal's paint? And it's half-way decent he was to-day alongside some fits I've seen him in. He can blow seven gales when he likes. Idee . . . givin' an old bachelor at Skillagallee the pennant. Another year spoilt. Well, well . . . put that old sock back up on the flagpole to-morrow." He knocked out his pipe. "Damn that gal, anyway." He omitted to say, "Excuse me."

His daughter still was absent from the kitchen. But the table was set and supper steamed on the back of the range. Captain Stocking, breathing hard, tiptoed noisily up-stairs and rapped on her door. Norman heard him arguing. He came down quietly at length, with Sue at his heels.

Norman stole two glances at the side of her face while he scoured his hands. He saw that she had been crying. And this was the girl who boasted to him the first night that she never cried? Never did, eh? He felt at ease with her suddenly, as if for once they had changed their positions. So here was the kind of affair that humbled her, a silly big-faced woman like Cat-eye McGoogan and a can of pink paint.

"Now that our squally visitor has sailed off," Norman said cheerfully as he pulled out his chair, "I begin to feel an appetite."

Sue avoided his eyes. She did not sit down at the table.

"I need kerosene," she made excuse. "No, no, I'll get it myself."

"Got to have it right now?" asked her father. He had served himself to meat. "The new drums aren't open yet. All that's left o' the old is up in the tower."

"My can here is dry," she answered. She went out nervously, carrying one small oil can and an empty brass lantern.

"Sue's kind of upset herself," the keeper grumbled. "She wanted that pennant as much as I did. Never'd admit it, but she did. She had things good and shipshape everywhere else." He chewed morosely. "Sot old fool!" he exclaimed. "What's a bachelor know about shades of paint? Couldn't tell green from yellow, weren't for the chart in his pocket . . . well!"

Norman emptied his plate twice.

"Sue's gone a long time," he remarked. He pushed back his chair. "I'll go see what's keeping her."

He followed her path across the plank walk from the kitchen door to the light tower. It was dark in the room at the bottom of the narrow stair, except for a queer light that shone through the hole in the ceiling, a queer light for sunset. He heard Sue running downward.

"Norman!" she called. "Norman, Norman!"

He raced upward. He smelled burning oil as he turned the first angle. He met her on the landing. Flames twisted up her skirts. She was striving to rub them out.

"Norman!" she cried again.

Norman, eh? Not plain Erickson!

She gave a smothered cry as he rolled her against the wall.

"Let me go . . . get up-stairs! I was lighting my little lantern . . ."

Norman beat at the flames. She fought his hands as he freed her. Fear for herself had fled, in its place surged anger.

"I tell you, get up-stairs!" she screamed.

"Buckets!" Norman ordered. "No water. Sand!"

He plunged up to the lamp room. She had upset a gallon of coal oil on the shiny floor and had dropped her lighted lantern into it. Yellow flames lapped across the gray paint. Norman shed his coat, flung it down on the fire, and stamped his feet upon it. Pungent, unsavory smoke hit his nostrils. He heard Captain Stocking panting upward.

"Bring sand!" Norman bellowed.

The older man retreated. His rubber heels beat a jerky tattoo stumping down the stairs. Norman, working feverishly, slogged at the small yellow flames. A stuffed, choking, acrid taste bit his throat.

"Here's sand!" cried Sue Stocking.

She staggered in, bearing two tin buckets. Her burned dress hung in strips.

"More!"

Norman heaved one bucket. The edges of the pail were wet and sand hit the floor with a damp sucking hiss. A patch of flames smothered out. He heaved again. Fire reached the wall by the window and crept in yellow licks around a table leg. He beat it out with his arms. There were lenses above . . . it must not reach the lenses . . . ten thousand dollars those lenses cost. . . . He caught another pail from Captain Stocking's hands. The keeper had carried four up the steep winding stair. His face was white with a streak of soot across it.

"Sue's calling coast guard!" He stamped at the flames ineffectually.

"I don't want coast guard!" Norman turned around crazily.

He thought old Stocking looked crazy himself with his colorless, frightened fat face. The equipment on the table jiggled . . . let it jiggle . . . sweat from his forehead blinded him.

"Don't need coast guard!" he shouted. "Here—" he thrust his blistered arms into a pail and aimed the sand in chunks—"more pails, Capt'n!"

He jerked down a tarpaulin and slammed it on the floor. Fire? Sure, he could beat fire! It wasn't wind . . . it wasn't storm . . . who needed a coast guardsman to drown out fire? He felt dizzy . . . cool, this sand . . . he planted it carefully . . . here, there . . . damn it, there wasn't any fire, wasn't any danger. Just that filthy smell!

"Hi! Captain!" he shouted huskily.

CHAPTER VII

THE SEA AND THE SOIL

"THE boy's a damn fool!" Captain Parish said distinctly.

Norman opened his eyes. His face hurt. And his hands. Hurt like the devil.

"Needn't use such language, Josiah," Captain Stocking argued.

"Use any language I want, Sam'l," Parish answered. "Fine thanks, ain't it? Try to save a man's life and have him knock you down a million stairs! The fool was drown'd in fire. . . ."

"The fire was out! And I tell you, Josiah Parish, it ain't fitting, such talk. There's been no such words around this lighthouse for ten year . . . my, my, what's happened this day . . . Erickson put Sue's fire out, Josiah Parish. Coast guard didn't have an oar in it. We didn't need coast guard. Faith, and I'd knocked your man down too, days I was wild . . . wish't there'd been a hundred and eighty steps. . . ."

"Is the fire out?" asked Norman.

The group in his bedroom started. Captain Stocking was walking violently without his shoes up and down the bare painted floor. Captain Parish of the coast guard sat astride the chair. He coughed just as Norman spoke. Sue Stocking came toward the bed.

"All out," she answered.

"What's the matter then?" Norman demanded.

"Nothing!" answered Sue. Her voice was mild. "Lie still."

"You put out a mean mess o' kerosene," her father cried. He mopped his fat red face. "Saved a lens, far as I can figger, saved the whole tower . . . nice mark it'd been against Sam'l Stocking, his gal burnin' up the ship. . . ."

Captain Parish interrupted.

"You knocked my number seven man clean down-stairs. . . ."

"It didn't hurt him!" cried Sue Stocking.

Parish growled: "Knocked him clean down-stairs for trying to lug you out!"

"Erickson didn't need luggin' out," the keeper argued. "By hoky poky, Josiah Parish"—he clucked his tongue—"there I go again! I wish't you'd go home, Josiah."

"Who'd I hit?" Norman asked.

"You hit Ed Baker," Sue explained to him. She opened a box of red salve with her left hand; her right was bandaged. "He came up to the tower and you knocked him down. Norman didn't know he hit him, Captain Parish. And the fire *was* out."

"Sure the fire was out!" Samuel Stocking turned on his daughter. "No thanks to you, Susan. You certainly have done your share o' mischief to-day. What a day, what a day! Paintin' your bedroom pink and droppin' lanterns, and then, as if that wasn't enough, callin' out the coast guard for something the lighthouse service could handle by itself."

He switched his attack to Norman. "It was that Baker come first, your fr'end Baker! Busted up them stairs like a seasick cow . . . glad he don't tramp around my lantern every day, Josiah Parish. You was capsized in your head, Erickson. Funny we all ain't, with these excitements . . . you was yellin' wild, and when Baker ran up you pitched into him bow first."

"It didn't hurt him," repeated Sue Stocking.

"Might of. And it wouldn't have been the first time he plunked him either." Captain Parish strode out of the door. "Night, Sam'l," he called from the hallway. "Night, Miss Sue."

Norman tried to think. The buzz of Blind Man's Eye droned through the open window. His hands and arms and face were bandaged, with a sickening ointment that smelled like fish oil . . . he was very sleepy . . . there had been a fire, he had knocked Ed Baker down the tower stairs. . . .

"Why'd I ever do that?" he asked Sue Stocking.

She had slipped from the room. So, apparently, had Captain Stocking. The assistant keeper turned over miserably and slept. In the middle of the night he dreamed of old Gustaf and awoke, sweating, with the bandage torn from one hand.

Doctor McCarthy made three trips to Blind Man's Point, growling each time at the sand. He discarded Sue Stocking's fishy salve on his first visit, but each time when the doctor was gone, Sue discarded his, declaring it too weak to be of value, and redressed Norman's face and hands with her own ointment.

The lamp room showed bad scars, the keeper reported; that was all; it needed a little paint, a nail or two.

"Thank the Lor'," he said fervently, "and that ain't a swear, Erickson, thank the Lor' old Cat-eye's been here an' gone!"

It was seven days before Norman dressed in his uniform and prowled dizzily around the lighthouse reservation; in twelve he resumed work, in two weeks he took his first day off duty. The coast guard boat was running up to Madrid Bay that morning. Captain Parish, thrusting his face into the kitchen doorway as an old ship pushes its bowsprit into a water-front slip, saw Norman preparing to leave. He hesitated, then asked him gruffly if he wished to go along in the boat.

"No, thanks," Norman answered, "I'm walking inland."

He was undecided where to go. He wanted to see his father. And he wanted to talk with Julie Richaud. He had had no word from Madrid Bay since Jim Nelson's advice to wait a little longer before coming back. He had written again, a short embarrassed letter to old Gustaf, enclosing half his second pay check. He would like to go to Madrid. But Nelson knew best probably. He was faithful, a friend of both Ericksons.

There still was Julie. He had not written her, had not known what to write. But he had thought about her, unconsciously compared her with Sue Stocking. The comparison had got him nowhere. The two girls were like the colors on Cat-eye McGoogan's paint chart. You couldn't mix them up . . . nevertheless he felt that Julie would be glad to see him in spite of his long silence.

He started out about mid-morning, and a short distance up the beach passed the shanty of Steve Sutton the fisherman. Sutton hailed him from the dock, where he was sitting with a large and comforting mouthful of tobacco. He pulled in his line and leaned dilapidatedly against the stern of his idle boat. Norman had exchanged few words with him of late. He did not visit the lighthouse as often as formerly.

"You seen Baker?" Sutton asked.

"Not exactly."

"He's a smart one!"

"How you mean, smart?"

"Says he saved your good-for-nothin' life after you'd near burnt it up."

"Well, it doesn't matter what he says."

"Good you think so. That garfish has got a lot of canvas on where Sam'l Stocking's consarnt, and Sam'l's Sue. What you think, him gettin' in the coast guard?"

"Maybe he wanted in. I didn't."

"But there's lots as did want the berth. I wanted it. Wrote out my application . . . I'm a neat writer. It ain't the good men they're a-handin' the good jobs. Three year I'm after it. And who gets it? Baker. Gets it by a drag, a rusty winch like him. It's the devil's shame you didn't finish him off proper."

"When?" asked Norman.

"First night you come."

"You know it wasn't I hit him that night!"

"Some good man did."

"You got a right to think so, Sutton," Norman answered.

He stalked on angrily, leaving the fisherman sprawled like a skinny old man of the sea across the stern of his neglected boat. An odd fish, Sutton. And like every one else on the point, he couldn't forget that first night's episode. Norman walked on thoughtfully. He had never told these people how long he had known Ed Baker. He might explain that to the keeper and Sue some day, tell them about the fight when he was a boy. He remembered all its trivial details . . . the smell of the dust when Ed rolled him over and over on the road, the taste of blood in his mouth . . . and how funny Ed had looked next day trying to chew that strong tobacco . . . no, he still couldn't tell any one about that fight.

He had never confessed it even to Julie. It was too late now, years ago, and of no importance . . . it was just one of those little memories in his life that kept cropping out again and again, like his revulsion to his father's sea stories. He'd nearly forgotten that tale of the schooner *Gottland* and the captain's wife and dog. Weather had been calm since he came to Blind Man's Eye. Trust him to remember it, remember the dog and the stingy woman as soon as there blew up a storm!

He turned from the beach at the edge of the first pine wood and tramped through a thin, sweet-smelling second growth until he met the old lumber road that led back to Copperhead highway. The country changed, once he was out of the sand-dunes. The smell of hot dry soil overwhelmed and swallowed the buoyant breath of the lake. Houses of tar paper, others with sides of clean shingles, still others plastered like Germaine Richaud's, sat insecurely on gravelly hillsides surrounded by unfenced fields. The potatoes needed rain Norman noticed. The farmers he passed on the road were talking of beans and sour cherries or the price of vegetables peddled among the summer resorters up by Ottowa Lake. They were small dark men who chirruped their good mornings and slashed their horses with talkative vigor.

Norman found his ear out of practise with the *patois* of the French Canadas. It had been two months . . . oh, longer than that, he was ashamed to figure how long . . . it had been nearly three months since he visited the Richaud farm. He turned to the left up a tricky, hilly cattle path. This looked like back country, all right. Another world. They were funny folk, these Michigan Frenchies. He used to tell his mother so didn't he, and she laughed and insisted they were not a bit funnier than the Danes? Well, she was right. Nobody on earth could be any queerer than his father. Julie Richaud had seen Gustaf recently no doubt . . . she would have news.

He would like news.

A calf was bawling in a barbed wire fence. Norman stopped and set her free. He reflected with some humor that modern improvements did not always yield efficient return; one enterprising farmer paid for newfangled wire while his back-hills neighbors lived happily unfenced and his own calf cut her knees getting out! How

did these families make ends meet, farming up here? How did the Richauds manage? Their house lacked conveniences, but they were clean. Not as clean as Blind Man's Eye! Nothing in all the world was as spotless as Keeper Stocking's light. These French farmers could learn many worth-while lessons from old Samuel.

Norman looked back, far down the hills to the sandy yellow strips of dune that marked the location of Blind Man's Eye. Lake Michigan lay afar off with its splendid distances, its coastwise jealousies, its vast, wet, eternal toil. Here was land; the very breath of it shut a man in. He stood uncertainly a minute, trying to smell the water. He caught it once, but the day was too hot and the air had a heavy flavor of soil. He felt lost inland. Now how could he explain that? When he was uncomfortable on the lake? He shrugged his shoulders, with one of his mother's funny little gestures. It was too deep for him!

The Richauds all were busy on the farm. Julie, when she saw him approach, put down the box of cherries which she was pitting and ran into the house. She reappeared in a green gingham dress while he opened the bars at the end of the lane. Her cheeks were sharply colored when he came up with her, and her purple black hair was curling in the heat. More than ever she looked like a little girl.

"You, after all this time!" she cried, and stared at him. "What's happened to your head, Norman? And your hands?"

"Burned a little," he replied. He was like his father in speech; he had a short way of answering questions. His mother used to tell him it was rude.

"Burned?"

He laughed off her anxiety. He was glad to see Julie, gladder than he had imagined he would be.

Somehow, he expected her to have changed. So many things had happened since last he saw her . . . years had run by in a few months. But if she had changed, it was only that she was handsomer, that her eyes were darker and rounder and that the color on her cheeks was a deeper scarlet. She held her head a little higher, perhaps. But she looked so young . . . as if the soil had been kind to her, had permitted her to have quiet thoughts.

Those other girls and women down at the shore—Susan for instance, and the few wives of coast guardsmen whom he had seen—seemed to be holding something in, to be hardening themselves against the lake. They never looked like little girls. Could you ever tell what they were thinking? But Julie . . . her eyes told Norman just now that she was happy, deliciously happy to see him, and nothing else in the world was bothering her head.

"Well, I came back," he said. He laughed, and then wondered why he laughed. Perhaps it was because of Julie's smile.

"But Norman! You are thin!" she told him. "Thin as a bean pole. And your head must be very badly hurt. Here, come into the shade."

He walked beside her to the spring, under an old beech tree near the house. Her fingers, gripping his arm, were firm. They held like tight wires. She sat down, and pulled him after her gently. It was cooler here. There seemed to be more air. But how stuffy this land felt! Only the cedars in a green knot by the gate breathed down a soft sweetness.

"Tell me quick, you are badly hurt?" She touched the bandage on his forehead.

Norman laughed. "Not bad. Skinned up a little. We had a fire. Julie, how are you?"

"I?" she shrugged. "My health is perfect, thank

you! What else is there to do here on this farm but keep good health?"

"And your father?"

"Just as usual. When were you hurt?"

"Two weeks to-day. Did you hear, Julie, I'm working at the lighthouse?"

A deep crease shot across her forehead. "I know." For a moment she was silent, and then her mood changed. She was like that, Norman remembered. She could shift her humors like a Great Lakes wind. "Have you had your dinner?" she asked. "Ours is late to-day. Mother and father will both be glad to see you. Come in with me. And how did you say you were hurt?"

"I told you, we had a fire at the lighthouse. It's a fine light, Julie, you'd like it down there."

"I think I would not," she replied firmly, and opened the kitchen door.

The room was full of steam, of little Richauds, of the inviting scent of French cooking. Old Germaine was scrubbing his face in a towel.

"Ho, Norman!" he cried. He ran forward hospitably with wet hands, tripped over a small son, wiped his hands on his stained denim overalls, and called on heaven and earth to look at the bandages on this boy's head.

"The good saints above!" he screamed. "Who . . . who hurt you?"

Norman grinned. He had forgotten how Germaine could scream. He was as excitable as Captain Stocking.

"I'm not hurt. Just burnt a little."

He told the story bluntly. Germaine seemed impressed when he finished; all the family were admiring. It pleased Norman for the Richauds to think him a hero. They even called him one. There was a thought to make the coast guard laugh! At dinner, while

Julie's mother bobbed busily about the table, with Germaine crowing, waving his knife and fork, gulping carrots and peas between excited sentences, and with Julie Richaud silent beside him, Norman described Blind Man's Eye and his days and nights on duty. Germaine grumbled now and then. After a time he interrupted.

"What is this sailing business to you?"

"This is not sailing. It is the light service."

"And what is the light service? It is on water! They are all alike, all a ver' big case of poor eggs, all men that hang around water. Your boss, you call him keeper, could he skin a shoat? *Non!* He could not walk straight maybe on land, like other sailors I have seen. He drown some day!"

Julie's mother brought a platter of pork. She was a short capable woman, inclined to be overfat.

"Come, come, papa," she protested, "you like to eat the fish that somebody else catch, is it not true?"

"*Non,* I do not like fish. I prefer the little poultry. Are men made to fly? *Non,* nor to swim. The good God made them upright like Him, to walk on their feet on land! He give them spades to dig with!" He turned fiercely on Norman. "You did not like to fish?" It was an accusation as much as a question.

"No," Norman admitted.

"Then why you go trot-trotting to a light? It is a lazy job. Your back, does it ever ache?"

"Often."

"Not from hard work at a lighthouse. It is the lazy business. And who pays for it? Who pays for all the fine gover'ment jobs? I know! I read it in my paper! The people in boats, do they pay the taxes? *Non!* The farmers in the hills, we pay for it!"

Norman wet his lips. He was conscious that Madame Richaud was trying to calm the conversation. He never

had heard Germaine talk this way before. Surely Julie did not hold this hostility to the lake . . . he looked straight at her. Her cheeks were red, and she had eaten only half her dinner. Once when they talked she had told him he must not think of fear on the lake or anywhere else. . . .

"Tamarack River has enough water for me," Germaine said, pointing his fork at the window, "too much water. Maybe Tamarack will flood sometime."

"I'm not a farmer," Norman said stubbornly.

"Your *grandpère,* your mama's father, he was a farmer. A ver' good farmer. I know him, he was my friend. He came down from the Canadas and raise potatoes."

"No potatoes for me."

"Maybe you die of the devil!" growled Germaine Richaud.

Norman flushed. He talked crops during the rest of the meal and spoke to Julie only once or twice. She looked more and more unhappy.

"Come with me," she bade when they finished their dinner. "I must carry salt, two blocks of it, over there," she pointed toward the northwest. "The sheep are in that pasture."

Norman picked up the salt and strode willingly beside her. He was glad to be alone with her. Something Danish, something un-French, had welled up in him when her family talked of potatoes. Certainly Julie would not agree with Germaine! But she had become silent, she whose tongue was unaccustomed to silence. She walked now gravely, as if there were a matter she wished to speak of and dared not.

"Have you heard anything of my father?" Norman asked.

Julie turned, and her pink face relaxed. She had been waiting for that.

"Yes," she answered. They walked on ten steps, twenty. "I saw him last Sunday. He seemed all right, Norman. He *seemed* all right," she repeated. "Saturday he had fished. Jim Nelson is fishing partners with him."

"What did he say?" asked Norman.

"He is very angry at you, Norman. I had seen him once before since you went away. He was angry then because you did not go out in the storm with him. This time it was something else. He had heard that you broke a man's head in the dark. I said that if you did, the man deserved it."

"Oh?" said Norman.

"Your father was very angry at that. He screamed so loud all Madrid Bay listened. He told me Eddie Baker says it was over a girl . . . ."

"What'd he say?"

"Eddie Baker?"

"Baker? No, my father. I don't care what Baker says."

Julie looked at him keenly, then flushed.

"Your father sat on the bridge Sunday," she related. "We stopped, my father and I. So long we have not heard of you. I asked about you. *Zut!* He gave me the look of a panther, Norman. 'That boy is not my son!' he screamed. 'He's afear'd!'

" 'Maybe Norman don't like to fish,' I told him. 'Maybe he's meant for the farm. Fishing is bad for some people. They don't like to get wet, they don't like boats.' He became very excited then, Norman. He cried out you must never come back to Madrid, never.

" 'Good!' I said. 'Maybe he will come to the farm.' But no! Eddie Baker has told your father about the lighthouse . . . he says you went there because of a girl. . . ."

"A girl? Baker said that?" Norman felt his face redden. "That is ridiculous, Julie!"

Julie took a green linen handkerchief from her pocket and wiped her eyes. Norman frowned. He had forgotten how often country girls cried. He had seen Sue cry only once in all these months. Julie turned toward him beseechingly. What she said appalled him. He had never thought Julie would ask this!

"Next year you will farm, Norman? There, south across the river, do you see that nice forty acres? You can have it on shares from old Henri Plamondon." She pointed down the valley, and Norman, following her gesture, saw an unpainted house and barn. There was about it, even from this distance, a dusty air of desolation. "Till then you can work for my father, Norman, if you want. He does not wish you to live at the lighthouse. The beans are ready now, till potato digging. . . ."

Norman shook his head impatiently.

"But I am signed up at the light, Julie. Did you ever see Blind Man's Eye? It stands there on the lake tall as a soldier, unafraid of anything, of wind, storm, water, anything." He paused, seeking something that would appeal to her. "I have a fine uniform, Julie, with a little silver lighthouse on the cap. And at night the lamp sings, just like the choir over at Copperhead Church, only quieter. You would love it at the light. Next week, Julie, can't you come see it? Come and see Blind Man's Eye!"

Julie raised her chin. Her glowing black eyes almost met his blue ones.

"I don't believe I would care for the lighthouse business," she answered. "It is a wet business, Norman. Not like the farm."

"You don't know, Julie," he protested. "You never saw a lighthouse close up. Once you see it, you'll want to stay, the way I do."

"I'd better not come down then, Norman. I am

born in the hills. I am not meant for the wet lakes. You told me once your mother made a mistake. . . ."

"In marrying a sailor?" He leaped at the word. "Yes, but I'm not a sailor!"

"And we're not talking of marrying!" Julie's tone matched his.

"But we might?"

"No, Norman, no." She took the salt from him decisively and put it down with a thump upon the ground. "You haven't found your place yet, Norman. Once when you were here you told me you never were at peace in a storm. . . ."

"I said on water, Julie!"

"The lighthouse is water."

"No!"

She did not argue further. A new tenderness had begun to glow in his sturdy face and she turned abruptly from it. It seemed he was a full grown man to-day. He possessed more assurance, a strength that she admired. She sat down under a beech tree, and he dropped beside her.

A washed rocky declivity spread below them. Across a swampy meadow they could see Tamarack River, a busy talkative stream in broad gravelly banks. Nearer afield, drowsy cattle stood with heads lowered, cropping the scant grasses that fought through stony soil. Sheep wandered aimlessly up and down the northwest pasture under the cover of dark pine woods. From the opposite ridge a naked hemlock thrust out its dead arms, with a pair of crows squalling atop it. There was peace here, Norman admitted to himself.

"You come Sunday afternoon," he insisted. His voice was pleading. He took her hand affectionately in his. "Leave the rig in the woods at the end of the road. You have to walk the last mile or so over the dunes. Sunday afternoon I'll meet you."

Julie's lips were puckered a little, as if she were contemplating assent. She nodded her head, the quick, impudent, independent tilt that she managed so well.

"I'll think about it," she said; then, as if done with that subject she withdrew her hand from his and pointed one finger down the valley.

"Do you see them?" she asked. "My father's sheep? The one that's nearly white? Well, it has no sense. When I want it in the lower pasture, it must go in the upper. When I want it in the upper, it must go in the lower. It has not the sense to do what I tell it. It is only a sheep. I get very angry with it. Sometimes, Norman . . ."

"Sometimes what?"

"You are like a sheep," Julie said gravely. "When your father wants you to fish, you want to farm. When somebody else wants you to farm, you talk about lights."

Norman arose quickly. He turned on her with a swift harsh anger, but she did not shrink. She was looking at him soberly from her fine black eyes.

"Good-by," he said shortly. He moved away a dozen steps. She was childish with such silly prattle. Sheep! Let her tend her sheep that had no sense!

"Good-by," Julie answered. There was regret in her voice, regret and forgiveness but no hint of relenting. "Come again, Norman."

He did not put up the bars as he went through. He did not look back. At the main road he turned south, walked rapidly and spoke to no one on the way. He was angry. Angry at himself, at Julie, at his father. Wise Julie had told him what he had told himself a thousand times.

Lake or the land! It never would be his own decision. His mother and Gustaf had seen to that. He probably was a sheep . . . one minute this way, the next minute another. Julie Richaud could not under-

stand that tug within him, all she saw was the foolish way it made him look and act. He felt that she did not object to the water as her father did. Only she wanted him to love it whole-heartedly or leave it. And she had meant her "No!"

There was no budging Julie when she refused to do a thing. No budging Sue Stocking. No budging old Gustaf, for that matter. Each one of them loved a different thing. And he, Norman, loved each thing a little, but not enough to please any of them.

And what did he love most? He had missed the presence of the Eye to-day, missed it even in the daytime, unlighted. It was a hard demanding mistress there on the coast, part lake, part land, like his own blood. He felt a sympathy for Blind Man's Eye, a kinship for it. Landsmen had built it to serve the sea. He pitied the light . . . perhaps he loved it a little too.

It was hot walking on the sandy road. Norman loosened the bandage around his head. The Richauds had not laughed so much to-day as they usually did. That was one reason he had gone, to hear Julie's people laugh. His mother had not laughed often. His father did. But what queer things he laughed at, things that made other people shiver. He used to shake his sides at that tale of the schooner *Gottland*. There was no lightness in his father's mirth. It had something like salt away down in the throat. It was not a healthy laugh like Germaine Richaud's. But how unreasonable Germaine had been!

Norman shrugged his shoulders as he passed into the woods. After all, what matter what he did, or how people laughed? He trudged up the first of the great dunes and came out through a saddle in the sand banks and looked down to the west upon the staunch proud silhouette of Blind Man's Eye. He delayed a minute

on the dune. He wished that he had not come away from Julie so hastily. She wanted him to work at potatoes, eh? Well, he would not. He would not fish, but neither would he dig potatoes.

A fresh exploring wind struck at his cheek. It puffed out of the northeast where foul weather is born. A string of black cloud lay on the ridged horizon back of Madrid Bay. Overhead the sun shone. Again the wind slapped his face.

A storm making? Well, Germaine had growled that they needed rain. There had been no real blow since Norman came to Blind Man's Eye. Let her blow, he was willing for a test.

Julie was an independent girl, he told himself. And it was not a bad forty acres which she pointed out across the river. She had not said how much Henri Plamondon would want for it. A fellow might work it on shares for a year or two, then buy it on time. Julie certainly was independent!

By Mackinac, that north sky did look like a storm. One thing was sure. If ever he did farm, he would raise other crops than potatoes and beans.

CHAPTER VIII

JULIE RICHAUD

JULIE RICHAUD wasted no time in foolish regrets after Norman left her. She had been deliberately cruel in calling him a sheep. But she had done it for a purpose. She arose at once from her idyllic position under the beech tree and started across the pasture for home. There was nothing in her soul that required long periods of meditation. If any meditation were needed, she felt it should be done by Norman.

"He won't be back for another long time," she told her mother when she reached the house, "you might as well know it."

Madame Richaud looked at her searchingly.

"Julie," she asked, "must you like that boy so much?"

"Yes, mother," Julie answered. She felt the concern behind the question. She returned the look steadily. "If it isn't he, it won't be anybody."

Madame Richaud sighed. She bore a deep prejudice against good French taking up with outsiders. She had lived happily these twenty odd years as Germaine Richaud's wife, and she knew Norman Erickson's mother had not been happy with the sailor Gustaf. The other woman never confessed it to her; that was not necessary. A smart person need only look into her face. She had lost her peace of mind and her light excitable spirits. No, it didn't do for good, honest, hard-working, French farm-folk to lose their black heads and

their warm hearts to the first cold Scandinavian who happened to rove past their door. Their sons and daughters might be marked, just as Norman Erickson was.

But if Julie wanted him . . . Julie was first born and the most desirable of all her children. Again Madame Richaud sighed. It was wicked to love one child more than all the rest. But what a nice, naughty little baby Julie had been, and now what a naughty young lady! The sheep had not needed salt to-day as Julie claimed. Madame Richaud knew that . . . she sensed inarticulately why Julie must experiment with a falsehood about sheep in order to go as far away as possible, as far as the northwest pasture, to be alone with Norman Erickson. She knew that Germaine's conversation at dinner had irked her eldest daughter.

"How come he won't be back?" she asked sharply.

"We had words."

"He was not nice to you?"

"I was not what you call nice to him."

"Julie, child . . ." she strove maternally for the right advice, "he is not of us, not of the hills, not all of him. . . ."

"I know that. It makes no difference."

"No difference? It makes difference to his mother! She leave her people for that Gustaf and not even to church did he ever go with her!"

"Norman is not like Gustaf."

"The good God is to be thanked for that," declared Madame Richaud.

Julie stood silent a minute, considering her mother's remark. She was prepared to argue against Madame Richaud's contention that all her children should live and die on a farm, though that was just what she herself had said to Norman. She withdrew uncomfortably to her room. She was conscious as she exchanged the

green gingham dress for an older one, that she was very tired. It was much more fatiguing to hold in emotion than to labor stoutly all day in a weed patch.

She had her own tasks on the farm; Germaine was too thrifty to permit any one to be idle. His womenfolk must give a hand if rain were coming or the price of potatoes dropping. But ordinary days they need not come into the fields.

"You t'ink it is good for the mama so to work?" he once asked his neighbor Plamondon. "The little garden, that is the woman's, and the milk cows. Cows do not like clumsy men. But the horse and field? *Non.* This is not the old country." He gestured always eastward toward the hungry lower Canadas whence his people had come.

Julie sat down reflectively in a chair by her bed. She was out of patience with her father. Norman deserved chiding, but it was her privilege, not Germaine's, to give it. Norman had not liked it when she cried. And he had not noticed the green dress.

She had noticed many new things about him. His face was harder. His eyes focused more often on her, and less on the distant clouds. She had felt his pride when he spoke of his work at the light. Her own pride had responded, and into her ready emotions swelled a revived distaste for Eddie Baker. She still called him Eddie. Why not? Didn't he still call her Julie? She had met him, too, in Madrid Bay the last Sunday . . . she had neglected to tell Norman that . . . and he had said, "Hello, Julie," in his cool voice that was either impudent or very self-possessed and she never knew which. Eddie always confused her. Time before last when she saw him . . . it was in June at a Sunday ball game when Copperhead played the Indians . . . Eddie had stopped her, and without any preface or explanation, had asked her how old she was now.

"Twenty?" he had repeated after her. "Then why the devil don't you get married? Germaine," he had called loudly to her father, "whyn't you marry this girl off? She's getting too old."

Germaine had growled, and Eddie had stalked on, laughing. Julie had not known then, or now, what he meant. Most girls in the hills did marry two years younger. Three times she had refused to "get serious" with a nice boy Germaine had picked for her. Neighbors the first two had been. The other was a St. Clair, of the well-to-do St. Clairs in Copperhead, and was earning forty-five cents an hour with the carpenter Couturier.

All three were steady churchgoing fellows. She remembered one other who bid zealously once for her affections, a studious young man no more like her own people than Norman was. He had been in her classes down at the institute where Germaine permitted her to go two summers. She had brought a kodak picture of him back to the farm with her. For six months, the winter she taught the Cemetery school, it had lain in a geography and she had looked at it only once or twice when the book happened to fall open at the page. Each time the details of his face had surprised her, as if he were some one she never had known . . . she needed no picture of Norman to remember how *he* looked. How many hours in the Madrid school she had stared at his long profile, in an effort to see what her mother meant by saying that he was born "marked" . . . "born in lightnings," Norman once explained it.

It was queer Norman had said so little about the girl at the lighthouse . . . she had seen him flush when she repeated what Eddie Baker told Gustaf.

After an hour, when Julie returned to the kitchen, Madame Richaud found excuse to resume the subject.

"Boys are plenty up here, Julie," she said. She

waved her hand broadly toward the hills. "Good boys."

"I know them," Julie answered. "They are all the same. All just like me. I want variety."

"Variety?" Her mother frowned. She did not comprehend at first. Then she spoke roughly. "Do we mate ducks with geese here in the hills? *Non!* The one little black gosling . . . his mother is white, maybe? That is your Norman Erickson! He was born . . ."

"Different," Julie put in impolitely. She did not wish again to hear her mother use the word "marked."

CHAPTER IX

THE CAPTAIN'S DOG

NORMAN walked rapidly the last mile of beach. The black cloud that had been visible only from the hilltop less than a half-hour before now loomed over the lake, puffing out its dark cheeks, threatening. The wind shifted to the north, then slid into the northwest. Lower upon the water, running ahead of it, approached a fog bank, like an animated wall of wet, smooth, gray stone.

"Let her blow!" Norman told himself. He spoke aloud unconsciously. His voice sounded flat, and he tried again. "Let her blow!" he shouted. That was better.

Far up the beach, half-way to the light, he saw Sue Stocking coming toward him. She was walking briskly, swinging her arms as if she enjoyed it, in a short duck skirt and a sailor's middy, with her hair blowing like a small boy's in the wind. Occasionally she stopped and skipped a flat stone out into the lake or kicked with her canvas shoes at broken bits of wreckage. When she would have reached Norman in another hundred paces, she sat down on a drift log and waited.

"Ahoy there, first mate," she cried, "it's time you came." She was in high spirits. "I began to wonder. Have you no sense at all? Sane men with their heads tied up in bandages don't walk so long in the heat!"

Norman smiled. It pleased him that Sue had come to meet him.

"My head's all right," he answered.

"Sit down," she ordered. "Rest a minute."

Norman sat beside her good-naturedly. This was the second time to-day a girl had ordered him around, and he rather suspected that Sue Stocking didn't care a broken fish-hook whether he obeyed her or not.

"It's going to blow," she said.

"Yes."

"The storm warning's flying at the coast guard station. Parish telephoned a bit ago. Barometer's kicking out its bottom. Where've you been?"

"Visiting." He looked at her suspiciously. He had learned to be on guard against this lightness in Sue's tone. Usually it meant that she was making sport of him. "Back country. Visiting friends."

"That's pleasant. What did she say, that left you so quiet?"

"Who?"

"Your back-country friends."

Norman stammered. Sue laughed as if she expected no reply, then stood up and adjusted her sailor tie.

"See how that fog is rolling down? You'd best get along, young man, and help the keeper with the signal. It's a double shift to-night, or I don't know old Michigan."

Small excited catsqualls riffled the water of the lake. Beach grasses bent landward. The wash began to talk, chattering against its gravel. Norman climbed over the side of a rotted old vessel that a winter's ice had flung up on the sand. Its planks were slippery. He went over first and reached out his hand to help Sue. She laughed and scrambled up alone, nimbler than he.

"I'm not an old lady," she said. "Dad's in the tower watching for weather," she added as they approached the house door. "I'm going in. I'll get supper right away. You'll be wanting it early."

After she had run up the steps Norman turned toward the tower. His feet were sore from the unaccustomed walking, his whole body ached. On the high iron deck that circled outside the lantern Captain Stocking was leaning over the low rail, bareheaded in the wind. In his hand he carried a white cloth . . . he'd been polishing something. When he saw Norman, he motioned.

"Ninety-one steps," Norman said to himself.

He climbed slowly. His thighs ached as well as his feet. In the lamp room he hopped over the new paint that covered the marks of the fire, mounted through the oil room up the trap into the lantern, and out upon the narrow windy deck.

"And it's a fine blow she's going to be to-night," Captain Stocking greeted him.

Norman assented without spirit. Strange where all his enthusiasm of the morning had gone. The keeper's cheeks shone bright red with excitement. Norman's own burned to the point of discomfort. He realized now why the day had felt so stuffy. It had not been the land's fault after all. A storm was coming. Far in the distance under the heel of the creeping fog bank, deep water sulked in a turbid smoky blue. Nearer stretched a ribbon of verdigris, an ominous shade, messenger of angry elements. Still closer to shore another strip lay gray as ashes, casting back uneasy lights against the sky, opaque, muddy, with a surly unwholesome depth. Already, in the rocks of Blind Man's Teeth, quiet water had turned a bilious saffron, enlivened by flashes of topaz.

"Best get the fog signal started," Captain Stocking directed. "Fire's laid up?"

"Yes, sir."

"Touch it off. Wait . . . I'm coming along of you."

The keeper himself insisted on doing the greater share of the work in the signal shack. The gages were toys in his hands. He read their markings carefully.

"I like startin' this old lady to bellering," he told Norman. "Like to hear her puffin' away in the night. Know some poor devil of a capt'n . . . excuse me, Erickson . . . know some poor devil of a capt'n's out there list'ning his head off."

"It sounds eerie," Norman said.

"Eerie? Don't sound eerie to me if that means what I think it does. Sounds good. I know, I've been out there. She's got a loud yellin' voice for bad weather. I like steam whistles. That Cat-eye McGoogan got to talkin' new stuff a couple of years back . . . compression business . . . whole set o' sireens I didn't know two eyewinks about . . . I set this old gal to tootin' the night he was here. He allowed next morning you could hear her."

The keeper chuckled, clanked shut the fire door, clattered the coal scoop to the cement floor and wiped his forehead with a wad of waste. Flame grunted through the flues. In the pit, open to give the blaze a vigorous start, hot red ashes dropped in chunks through the grates. The boilers already were heating. In twenty minutes Blind Man's voice would have pressure enough to begin its steamy cry.

"That's done," Stocking said. "I'm goin' to climb up top again now. Come along, Erickson. I want to watch it. It's healthy, watchin' a blow make. It starts good blood runnin' and kindles your liver."

Norman shivered.

"Cold?" asked Captain Stocking. "My, oh my, man! This ain't cold. It's sweltering. You not cold? What *is* the matter then?"

He mopped his wet face. The steel-rimmed spectacles slid impishly down the bridge of his perspiring

nose. He straddled them on tighter and gazed again at the steam gage. He lighted his pipe before stepping out to the sand. Norman strode beside him. Fresh winds whipped from the northwest. The sun, making a brave stand, still held its place above the horizon. The captain did not interrupt his talking.

"Fog and wind does a lot of mischievousness together. I know, I've had my slicker full aplenty. One alone's bad enough, but together . . . that's what makes skippers grow fast to their pants, Erickson. Mean, them fog banks, ain't they? Why out in Huron once . . . no, no . . . can't tell it without swearin', and I ain't a swearin' man. Well, we can get one good look around yet. Be the last, maybe, for a stretch. Weather's mighty like molasses when she gets thick on this coast. Takes a deal of sun to melt it."

They panted together up the ninety-one steps. It was gloomier this time on the iron deck. The sun had dodged behind a cloud bank close to the west horizon, a sooty cloud bank that stretched like a black arm across the furthermost frontiers of the lake. Out of the north the fog marched closer, overwhelming the open spaces, a gray invincible battalion cheered on by the voice of the winds.

"She'll blow the fort off Mackinac!" Stocking grumbled. "Such a night and Blind Man's Teeth start chattering. Bad!"

Norman looked out across the water. He was appalled by its threat. Always before a storm it seemed wetter, ready for drownings.

"Something moving there?" he shouted into Stocking's ear. "Off that way?" He pointed west. "Way out there. . . ."

The keeper squinted.

"Can't see, ought to brought the glass."

"A steamer?"

"Don't see. Aye, aye . . . you've good eyes, Erickson. Mine used to be like that. Aye, that's a steamer, a small one. I see it plain now. No . . . that's not a steamer. Maybe it's a fishboat. She's moving fast, eight mile out, ten maybe . . . a gasoline boat . . . yacht."

"She'd best run into harbor at Madrid."

"She'd best not. It's slipping too close under the shelter o' Mustache Point that's the end of many a good vessel. Get's blowed across, anchors drag, rudders bust up, all kinds of things."

Norman thought suddenly of his father when the keeper mentioned Mustache. It was not good news Julie had of him. . . . "Need never come back. . . ."

"My dad went ashore on Mustache years ago," he said.

"Did, eh? Well, he might 'a' done worse. Might of come on here to Blind Man's Teeth. They'd of grabbed him. Hungry? This is the hungriest bit of coast I ever see, Erickson, and I know a sight of them. They calls Whitefish Bay the graveyard of the lakes. Lor', it's nothin', nothin'! Forty-one I knows of has come ashore here, schooners, tugs, barges, hookers, mail boats. Look down there . . . see them ribs? Right there by that green-lookin' rock. Next rock to it, see that decking? And that's a whole side o' a schooner off to the left. We tried to lift her once, her centerboard lays on the reef."

Norman's eyes sought the open lake.

"That boat's running north fast."

"Aye, her skipper knows what he's doing. Tryin' to make shelter o' Battle Ax Head, I suppose. Well, here's luck to him. Best light up. Steam must be ready now, too."

The lamp sang out its humming melody. It blazed cheerfully and looked about curiously at the weather.

Then its rays sputtered as if incensed at the coming storm. Norman felt more at peace with the light on duty. Blind Man's Eye burned clear, come all the fogs of the inland seas, come cloud and storm-rack, hurricane, sleet, lightnings, come wrecks and wet death on the teeth off the blasty point . . . Blind Man's Eye stayed wakeful, looking squarely into the face of its age-old enemy, the lake. He was tempted to tell Captain Stocking how he used to watch it from Madrid.

"Pretty," he merely said.

"Aye," answered the keeper.

Already the steam whistle at Battle Ax Island far to the northwest was moaning, two long drawn snores across the wind, then four short blasts, panting to keep up with the first two. Norman hurried back to the signal house at Captain Stocking's heels. There was a hiss of steam and a click of small meticulous levers. Polished steel pistons moved up and down, the brass balls at the end of a rotating governor began to spin, clean nickel-plated wheels turned slowly, and in a rancorous, contemptuous howl, Blind Man's voice screamed its answer to Battle Ax . . . two short, one long, two short.

"There she be!" Stocking rubbed the glass of the gage with his spectacle chamois. "Go report for supper, Erickson. You first. It'll be an all-night job out here."

Steve Sutton had appeared from somewhere when Norman ran into the kitchen. He was not so ill-tempered as he had been in the morning. He had furnished the fish and again was invited to stay. It was a large perch this time, which he had caught that morning off the end of his dock. Bony but sweet, split open, served with hummocks of mashed and browned potatoes, string beans, baked apples, doughnuts . . . Sue knew how to cook. She still was in high humor.

"I like wind!" she cried.

Norman shook his head. "I don't."

"I like it," repeated Sue.

"So does my father."

Steve Sutton looked up inquisitively but did not speak.

Norman rattled the tin basin, dropped the soap into its dish, and opened the rear door. He carried the water across the stoop and ran back, his blond hair glistening in the lamplight.

"It's here," he reported, "rain, too. They need rain up in the hills."

Out in the dark the throat of the fog signal swelled with steam. Wind pounded the glass of the kitchen windows, thumped their sash, squealed, danced upon the panes. It had maddened feet to-night. Going to the stove for more potatoes, Sue looked out.

"Fog's thick," she said, "it can't last long, not with that wind blowing. Not so bad, just a blow, when it's clear."

Not so bad! Norman shrugged. Bad enough. The wind slammed the screen door, and he arose irritably and hooked it. Sue laughed.

"Bother you?" she asked.

Norman pushed back his plate.

"There's more fish," Sue said.

"No. I have had enough." He spoke defensively. Sue looked amused. She would look more amused, Norman reflected, if he told her all the grotesque, hideous thoughts that popped into his head as soon as the wind began to blow. Well, it wouldn't do to tell her. He'd better get out and relieve her father. Strange, how he felt to-night; not frightened as he used to be when a boy, but not comfortable. That cursed wind! It blew the sense right out of his head. But it never blew out the tower lamp. Duty is duty. Let her storm!

The fisherman remained at table, filling his mouth with the informal but mechanical efficiency of an ore loader at a barge, when Norman slid into his oilskins and buttoned the sou'wester under his chin. Chill wet fingers of mist washed his face as he opened the door. He returned to his bedroom and removed the bandages from his head. They felt uncomfortable and damp in the fog.

It was quite dark when he stepped back out-of-doors. The steam whistle was bellowing, all right! Blind Man's Eye looked down mistily through the damp thick air like a giant with a cataract. The boiler fires glowed red as he opened the door of the little box-like house. Captain Stocking had lighted the hand lantern and hung it back upon its hook.

"Your turn for supper," Norman told him. "Sue says come quick. I'll tend it here."

The captain shook himself into his tight slicker. His eyes pinched together in self-protection as he stepped out into the night. The signal howled. Wind answered it promptly, shrieking defiance at the flimsy appliance of man. The fog whipped across wet beaches, slashed past the beacon atop Blind Man's Eye with chill impetuosity. Norman stoked the fire.

It would be a long night. He might find a book . . .

The door burst open and Sue Stocking blew in. She had thrown a yellow rubber coat over her white sailor suit and fog drops gathered on her tumbled hair. Her eyes were shining. Wind whooped across the squat roof.

"Wonderful night!" she cried. "A regular wildcat. I couldn't stay in, didn't even wait to wash the dishes!"

"I don't like it," Norman admitted flatly. He observed the glow on her face. She was friendly to-

night. It was easy to talk to her. "I was born in a thunder-storm," he confessed.

"Lots of persons are."

"What you mean?"

"Just that. I was myself. Nothing remarkable about that . . . it didn't make me tongue-tied or anything! What about it?"

"You? Born in lightnings?"

"Aboard ship. In the middle of Lake Huron."

Norman looked bewildered. "And you like bad weather in spite of that. My mother told me . . ."

"Sure I like it. Why not? Dad did, too, when he was younger. It's only been lately that he's let thick weather get him."

The assistant keeper scowled. He repeated the words as if he might not have heard her right. "Thick weather? What do you mean by that? Does thick weather bother the keeper?"

Sue's face sobered.

"You're all wrong if you think my father loves storms now, Erickson. No, he starts off smart enough. Talks a lot about wind making him feel healthy. You've heard him. He can't keep it up long. He lost his last command a night like this. The schooner *Susan,* out in Huron. Mother wasn't along. She was ashore with me. I was in public school. The fog twisted him all up. He's told you about it. Since then he always gets nervous."

"Nervous?"

"Yes." She paused, looking at him curiously. "Why does that surprise you? He's an old man, Norman. Lots of men get cautious when they grow old."

"I know," Norman said humbly. He added: "My father doesn't. It'd be better if he did. But I was just thinking . . . about myself. I never supposed wind bothers the keeper."

"It doesn't bother me," the girl answered.

Steve Sutton swung open the door. His baggy corduroy trousers, unprotected by oilskins, clung, drenched, about his knees. His eyes were greenish in color and larger than usual. They reminded Norman of a frightened rabbit.

"Fog's breakin' a little," he said uneasily, "gettin' full of holes."

His breath was short. Norman and Sue both stared at him. It looked more like sweat than fog on his face. He closed the door with a bang and stood with his back to the naked brick wall, his hands against it. For the first time since Norman came to the Blind Man, Sutton seemed to crave companionship.

"What's the matter, Steve?" Sue asked.

"Matter?"

"Yes. What frightened you?"

Sutton tried to smile. There was no color in his scaly face. He ran his tongue around his lips; then crossed to the boiler, opened its door and spat into the fire as if his mouth were bitter.

"I seen her," he muttered.

"Who?" asked Sue.

"Seen her plain. She was off there." He pointed lakeward. "Fog busts a hole in itself and there she is . . . plain!"

His voice wheezed in a squally note. The fog signal rumbled. Norman looked questioningly at Sue.

"You're crazy, Steve," she said with indifference.

"Crazy? I seen her sure as Blind Man's Eye is a-shinin'! Off the Teeth plain. Just a-flashin' like. I run."

"Of course you ran," answered Sue.

Norman raised his coal scoop. "What did you see?" he demanded.

"The *Kitty K.*," Sutton answered sourly. "It's the

second time I seen her. Three times, and it won't be me here to see her again."

"What's the *Kitty K.*?"

"It's a silly coward's story," Sue Stocking exploded. "Sutton, I'm ashamed of you. I've told you before that all the talk about the *Kitty K.* is trash. A ghost ship? Rubbish. Who ever saw her? No *woman.* Some lazy old men with nothing better to do." She arose angrily and buttoned her slicker. "You make me discouraged with human nature." She paused with her hand on the door. "Here comes father."

Captain Stocking puffed in breathlessly. His raspberry nose shone in full bloom from the wind. He clucked his tongue, glanced around at the others and prepared to take off his tight oilskins.

"Some night," he remarked.

"Steve saw the ghost ship," his daughter said. She looked at Sutton with contempt. "Go on, Steve, tell him. The poor old *Kitty K.*"

"I *did* see her!"

"You see lots of things," Sue retorted. "I remember a sea serpent once. You saw it, plain you said, and somebody else ate it for trout. The *Kitty K.* went down fifty years ago, before you were born, Steve Sutton!" She paused while the fog signal hooted.

Captain Stocking spoke dubiously.

"It's a bad night, Sue. You better go stay in the house. No use traipsing around. A night like this I piled up my schooner in Huron. Water was cold that night. Where you see the *Kitty K.*, Sutton?"

"North. Off the Teeth. Plain, Sam'l. Only I see her, then I don't see her." The fisherman rubbed his hands, as if the wind had found his bones and made them cold.

"You saw the lights of Madrid Bay," Captain Stocking guessed, "through holes in the fog."

Sutton shrugged ill-humoredly. "It wasn't nothing human and live I seen, Sam'l. Think I can't sight a ghost ship and know it?"

"Well, they do say . . ." Captain Stocking scratched his head.

"Of course they do," Sue broke in, "a lot of simple-minded old men say anything. Straighten this fellow up, dad. Make him shovel coal."

"Where you going?" her father asked.

"Outside."

"Not staying outside?"

"I'm going to walk," Sue said firmly. "It will be good for me. I like wind. I like to feel it. I might look for ghosts, Steve. You're not busy, Norman. Come with me? Wipe your face first, it's covered with soot."

Norman looked at her admiringly. Sue *was* friendly to-night. He wiped his face on a towel and followed her to the door, conscious that Steve Sutton was glowering distastefully at him. He laughed when they were out in the air. His heart warmed with a new sense of manhood. He felt like an Erickson for once. Dead ships! Even *he* knew enough not to believe in dead ships. And here was Sutton, who talked loud and spiritedly on calm days of his adventures afloat and ashore, trembling now in a corner, claiming he had seen a ghost. Even Keeper Stocking acted uneasy as a cat.

Norman reached into his pocket for tobacco; no good; the wind would blow out the matches. Ghosts! As a boy he had learned there were no ghosts. His father would have a hard salty laugh at that. Well, there were all kinds of fears. And here he was, walking in a gale beside Sue Stocking. He felt astonishingly brave. He buttoned the strap of the sou'wester under his chin, buckled up his slicker, and stepped along beside the girl into the enraged and vehement night.

Fog lay thick upon the face of the lake. Atop Blind Man's tower the lantern shone sulkily through the harried watery air. Against the pebbles of the beach Lake Michigan cannonaded. Great winds tramped across the land. Flying sand stung Norman's face that still smarted from its burning in the tower fire. He drew a deep breath. Queer the way this girl liked wind. She even walked as if she liked it.

She asked him if he did; no, he didn't, but that made no special difference. They strode along silently after that; the air was too noisy for talk. A quarter-mile they waded through fog, wetting their feet in the swirl of little waves along the wash. Out upon the hidden waters of the lake massive breakers bunted their heads against the open mouth of Blind Man's Teeth, smashed, came on, smashed again in undismayed battalions. Spray whipped down the wind. The fog signal snored.

The assistant keeper felt Sue grip his arm. He could not hear what she shouted. But she turned suddenly and ran back to the signal house. He raced at her heels. Within the door she waited for him, her face white.

"Norman, did you see? Didn't you see?"

"See what?"

"A light, Norman, out there on the Teeth! Just once, wavering . . ." she swung angrily on Sutton, who had interrupted. "No, no, it wasn't your silly ghost! It was a ship. A live ship having trouble!"

"You're seeing things too, Sue," her father chided her gravely. "It's an awful easy thing to do." He had propped his chair under the small lantern and was reading the report of the Bureau of Lighthouses which Cat-eye McGoogan had left him.

"I'm not blind!" his daughter flared. "And I'm not crazy!"

"I'll go back and look," Norman offered. He glanced

at Sutton and laughed. "You got the fidgets, Sutton, talking, talking, always talking. There's things to be scared of. I know it as well as any one on this coast. But it's not ghosts. Ghosts! I'll go look for a light."

The night lay so black and the fog so thick that he waded in the wash again before he realized it. Wind whipped the spray into his face, bit at his eyelids, and chewed against the arms of his slicker. He strode up the beach to a shelf of sand back from the water. He did not try to look until his eyes became accustomed to the dark.

When the wind dropped for a heartbeat, he stared out intently. He had passed Sutton's fish house. At his left Blind Man's Eye shone down gloomily through the banks of fog, faded out behind opaque curtains of dampness, or when a wind hole snapped across the shore, glared brightly for a moment. He saw nothing else. No light. Sue had made a mistake. Slowly he started back. The fog signal howled, hooted, sobbed.

Scared? Certainly here was test enough. He was a man, assistant keeper of Blind Man's Eye; he could not afford to be scared. Steve Sutton with his silly ghost stories had set him right to-night, made him see how foolish all fears were. Ghost stories! He could tell worse stories than this one about the *Kitty K.*, true ones. He shivered, then laughed. He would like to see old Gustaf make sport of Steve Sutton. Suppose he told this fisherman the tale that his father liked best, of the voyage of the schooner *Gottland* and the captain's stingy wife and the dog? A good dog, hairy all over. There was a yarn to make Sutton quake, a true one.

Wind pried under his oilskins and he twisted his head to the right. His breath caught in the crook of his throat as he again looked lakeward. His heart gave a savage pound against his ribs. His mouth dropped open and a fearful wind filled it. Sue had been right. He

tried to shout. The gale pushed all sound back between his cold teeth.

The lights of a vessel flared through a rift in the fog, port and starboard, showing red and green, and above them a white masthead lantern rolling, twisting in the night. No mistake. Three lights.

He ran toward them along the shore, heedless of the backwash of breakers. In front of Sutton's fish house he stopped to look again. It was a boat all right. Aground. Chewing to pieces on Blind Man's Teeth.

How big a boat? He couldn't see. He ran a little farther. The shelving beach had been undermined by the breakers. The sand collapsed beneath his weight, flinging him into the wash. He rolled over, clawed at the gravel, got unsteadily to his feet. Again he saw the side-lights of the vessel glowing through the fog, close in. Steve Sutton's motor-boat lay two hundred paces up the sand. But no one man could launch it in this surf! No two men! There were people in that wreck. They needed help.

A great roller charged in, topped by foam. It caught his knees and flung him down. Once he rolled over, then the undertow sucked him out. Another roller poured down on him; he fought breathlessly. He must get word to the coast guard!

It was hard work, crawling back to shore. At least he was not afraid! He'd proved that to himself! Howling, ranting, white-haired old breakers lifted frantic arms above him, screamed, threatened, beat his face and broke across his head. Again he went down, felt himself dragged toward deep water. Something thrashed past him as he floundered in the wash, something bulky and shapeless and black. Sand and foam filled his eyes. The waves tied a wet band around him.

What was that thing that bumped him when it passed? Norman's drenched mind flashed back to his father. Damn that story! Always in storm he remem-

bered it . . . the singsong words of that hideous tale . . .

"We all was glad when it gets dark that night, so we don't look no more at the waves . . . that big wave come, two, three times big as all the rest . . . something float past me . . . two somethings . . . the captain's wife, the captain's dog . . . we feel sorry for that dog. But the woman? She give nobody enough to eat!"

Norman tried to get up to his feet. No matter what had floated past him. He was not afraid! The wave retreated, flung back by the invincible shore. As it went it carried with it all it could grasp in wet chill hands. It gripped Norman's legs, flung him down and choked him. Another thundered in and picked him up. It trounced him mercilessly on the pebbles, bunted him shoreward and tossed him, winded, upon the wash. Again something thumped into him before he could crawl out of the chilly water. A log. No, not hard enough for a log. Something hairy, something that softened as it brushed his shoulder.

He scrambled to his feet. Again the soft bulk that he could not see rubbed against his legs. He shook the water from his eyes. What was it? That thing there?

The fog broke apart for a moment and Blind Man's Eye looked down with a yellow beam on the gusty beach. Norman cried out.

At his feet floated the body of a dead dog. A big, strong, brown dog, hairy all over.

The son of Gustaf Erickson fled in panic up the sand. Unmanned, dismayed, calling mad words on the head of his father, he stampeded toward the lighthouse reservation. On the sooty floor of the fog signal house, he collapsed, a fugitive from relentless nightmares, from the terrors of his childhood, through those long, blasty, wakeful nights in the little room under Gustaf's shingle roof.

CHAPTER X

CAPTAIN SAM'L GOES OUT

Captain Stocking pulled his assistant up from the floor of the signal house and dragged him into a chair. He grunted, then looked down at his pipe, smashed to fragments in a pile of coal dust.

"For the love o' the locks!" he swore fervently.

The fog whistle hooted, two short, one long, two short. Norman Erickson cried out.

"There!" he gasped miserably, and pointed lakeward.

The fog whistle roared again. Norman, breathing hard, opened his haggard eyes and immediately squeezed them shut. Steve Sutton was staring at him from the corner, a big, awkward, mirthless creature with sweat and soot on his face.

"Scart!" he diagnosed. There was a whining triumph in his voice. "He seen it too, Sam'l, he seen the *Kitty K.*"

Norman swallowed. "I saw a dog!" he cried. "The captain's dog!"

Sue Stocking, leaning down, shook him hard.

"Have you lost your wits?" she cried angrily. She turned on her father. "He's wet, he's been in the water. . . ."

Norman pushed away her hands. His heart thumped from her shaking. He looked down at his legs, their flesh creeping still where the body of the dog had touched them. "I saw a dog!" he cried again. "There's

a boat on the reef. Dog washed ashore. A dog! A hairy dog! Dead! And three lights!"

"A boat?" Captain Stocking repeated, his voice rising. "Boat? A live boat? Not the *Kitty K.* . . .?"

"A live boat, smashing on reef. Saw her, plain! Dog ashore . . ."

Norman stopped, panting, and covered his eyes. Sue's expression was merciless. The fog signal hooted. He shivered convulsively.

"Well, I'll be sunk me'sel'!" The keeper's voice hardened as he glared at his assistant. He yanked his sou'wester down from its peg, hooked the lantern on his arm, and buckled the oilskins at his neck.

"You keep the fire goin' here, gal," he directed Susan sternly. "Get up, Erickson, and come along. Sutton, your boat. Your boat, drat ye!"

He swung angrily on the fisherman. Sutton's face, which had been white as canvas, began filling with color, now that he knew it was not the *Kitty K.* He leaped after Stocking.

"Best take the skiff, Sam'l," he cried as he plunged through the door. "That sea'll bust up a power boat . . . we kin carry in a line . . . sure, we can do it!"

"Bring 'em ashore in a skiff?"

"Two of us can take it out. . . ."

Captain Stocking came back to the fog shack, squalling: "You go tell the coast guard, Erickson! Run! Never mind the phone. Line's blowed down by now. Sutton and I will start in the skiff!"

"You go with my father!" Susan cried. "There's room in that skiff for three!"

Norman arose, his knees like milk.

"Tell the coast guard?" he repeated. He could not meet Sue's hard steady face. He tried to follow the keeper. "I'd rather go with you, sir. . . ."

"The coast guard!" Stocking shouted.

Norman staggered through the door, that swung banging behind him. Fog already concealed the captain and Sutton. A wind like creation's fury thrashed down from the vengeful north. Scuds of foam whipped across the signal house, pelted the gravel on shore, beat without mercy against the frame timbers of the lighthouse tower. Along the beach the spars and planks of dead half-buried ships broke the lake's attack; it retreated to fling forward again immediately. Norman plunged headlong through the sand. The tower light was at his back as he ran. A wall of somber fog met his eyes. Dimly through it he saw at last the night lantern in the porch of the coast guard station, the dark look-out tower, the black closed mouth of the boat-house doors. A yellow light shone in a lower window. He tripped across the flower boxes toward it.

The first man he saw as he flung open the door was the new number seven, Ed Baker.

"Wreck!" Norman cried.

Baker dropped his newspaper. He slid one suspender up over the shoulder of his blue flannel shirt and stared at Norman unbelievingly. From the room adjoining, Captain Parish pushed his sharp choppy face through the doorway.

"Call!" Baker shouted. "Call!"

"Where?" Parish demanded.

Ed Baker pointed to Norman. The assistant keeper leaned against the center table with both hands shaking. He was choking for breath.

"Wreck . . . Blind Man's Teeth . . ." he chattered, "small boat, dog washed ashore."

Captain Parish whipped around, his jaw tighter.

"Anderson," he shouted, "you go tell my wife, then run for Carlson, patrol south. Quick, man. Got a call! Get Shay down from the tower, Baker." He gave his

orders rapidly. "Where is this wreck, Erickson? Speak up! On the Teeth, eh? Close in? Reach it with the gun and buoy, maybe?" He stopped, then gave his own answer. "No, can't do that! Ag'in' the wind tonight! And a power o' surf to bust through launchin' a life-boat!"

Norman wiped the spray from his face. Before his eyes the bare coast guard living-room danced dizzily, in his head roared frightful words, sounds, horrid fancies, hideous nightmares resurrected from his boyhood. He heard his father's old singsong voice telling terrible stories. Stories of a dog. He heard the wind rattling the hand-hewn shingles above the bedroom where he had slept at home. He saw his mother, saw her plain as lightning for one ghastly moment, that night old Gustaf beat her because their boy cried, cried like a baby over the tale of the schooner *Gottland.*

Baker stamped in with young Shay running behind him, a green thin-armed lad with a sunset complexion. They left puddles on the floor inside the door. Captain Parish, shooting orders like bullets while his men raced for their rough weather clothes, slid to his desk in the corner, slammed down its lid and locked it. He put the key in his pocket, took it out, looked at it dubiously, as if he might never see it again, and hung it in plain sight on the wall ready for some one else.

"I'm short two pairs o' hands," he snapped, "comes o' leavin' men go visitin' with their wives! Gave number five his afternoon off and he's takin' till morning. Engineer's on vacation. You'll have to go along with us, Erickson . . . need eight men to handle that boat . . . such a night . . . you mind the engine, Baker!"

He padded his rubber boots through an open door to the boat-house. Norman trailed after him. The lifeboat bulked astoundingly large in the confines of her

small quarters. She lay in her cradle, upon a track that notched the bottoms of the wide doors and shot in straight lines down to the water. Spare oars hung neatly on pegs along the walls. She was a new, self-bailing, cabin craft, trim, sturdy, white, her sidelamps alight, ready for any emergency; her coils of line neat as grass mats on the decks fore and aft, her brass glowing in the beam of the lantern; stout enough and fine enough to do any act demanded. The doors banged open and wind piled in energetically.

"Ease off there!" Captain Parish shouted. "Watch them blocks!"

The big boat moved in her cradle, slid forward, and upon smooth sure rollers started toward the shore against ferocious wrenchings of the wind. The crew held firm hands upon her. Norman gripped the stern. The night was unbelievably dark now; he could not see even the fog.

Spray ripped up from the wash and jammed impudently into the faces of men whose daily duty is defiance of the elements. The bow of the life-boat slapped like a hand against the first exploring rollers. Wind pushed excitedly upon the starboard planks. Norman heaved determinedly along the port side, next to Anderson and Captain Parish. He felt better, doing something, helping! Helping get the boat off! He knew Parish needed eight men . . . he'd go . . . sure he'd go . . . he'd show Sue Stocking, show the keeper. It was not his turn yet to jump . . . he must wait his turn. . . .

A great roller galloped up the sand, tripped his legs, yanked the boat, twisted her spitefully out of the strong hands that held her, thumped her down.

Norman did his part stubbornly . . . it was still not his turn to jump.

"Heave!" Captain Parish screamed through the

turmoil. His mouth reached close to Norman's ear. The next wave buried both men to their waists.

"Heave!"

The boy Shay, on the decking, jabbed the beach with a pike pole. Still another drenching wave.

"Come . . . hurry . . . in with you!" Parish cried. His lantern had gone out long before. A wave pushed the surf-boat back toward the sand, the undertow dragged it lakeward. Back, out, back, out . . . every man was aboard except Norman and the captain. Parish leaned close and bellowed.

"Your turn last . . . jump!"

Norman bit his teeth together and made ready to obey. With wet smarting eyes he saw the lean big-boned officer swing aboard. He reached for the gunwale. A torrential wave slapped against his face. He saw the black shadow of the life-boat jerk away. He struggled toward it, saw another high gray wave cut him off from the boat, saw the plunging starboard light shine green through the fog.

"Come!" the captain's voice snapped back to him on the wind.

Norman leaped forward with all the strength that was left in his legs. He heard Ed Baker cry:

"Yaller-bellied pick'rel!"

The assistant keeper waded out savagely, while a cold roller spattered him with a power that chilled his spine. Afraid? He afraid? He'd show them! Show Baker! Show old Gustaf! Baker was wrong this time! They were all wrong, always had been wrong. He was going! His breath strangled in his throat.

"Come!" the men were shouting. "Come!"

He ducked his head and scrambled forward. The stern of the boat floated three arm-lengths off. Norman sprawled after it.

Destiny intervened. A roller, greater than all the

others, heavier, angrier, leaped out of the darkness. It fell savagely on the man who was left, flung him backward far up the beach, trampled him into the gravel, and retreated satisfied.

The cries of the laboring crew echoed hoarsely from the distraught lake. Down the troubled wind sounded a short staccato bark as the motor coughed and caught. The life-boat was making hard progress against unwilling water. Norman clawed upward to a shelf of sand. Winded, beaten, wet, impotent, he glared at the howling lake. He heard Captain Parish scream a hard chesty order as the gale dropped for a second. Men obeyed his voice. Norman sobbed. Standing numb but secure on the gusty beach, the son of Gustaf Erickson watched the coast guard crew go out to its dangerous duty.

Back in the hot, steamy signal house, Sue Stocking clanged the coal scoop against the boiler door, stuffed the firebox with fuel, and slapped the door shut vigorously. She had pulled on a pair of sooty white gloves to protect her hands from the heat. Squinting like her father, she read the steam gage.

"That'll do," she commented aloud. "I can leave it ten minutes . . . I can go look!"

She tightened her oilskins and ran out into the storm. The whistle snored in her ears as she closed the door . . . two short, one long, two short . . . a minute's breath, then two short, one long, two short. Her father's lantern jiggled far up the beach. The skiff had not yet got off! Once, exerting her eyes, she made out distinctly the wrecked boat on Blind Man's Teeth; a small boat, or one lying close to the water. She could see no lights; then a masthead lantern thrashed up, was bright for an instant, and faded.

Anxiously she splashed through the wash toward Steve Sutton's fish dock. She could see her father's lantern standing now on the sand two hundred yards

ahead; figures, bending and struggling, passed hurriedly between her and its light. She realized that they were launching Steve's boat. It was a mighty frail boat for such a sea. And Steve's oars! Not the kind of oars a decent sailor would keep on hand for rough weather. And only two men pulling.

She ran faster . . . she might get there in time to help push them off. She was very angry, so angry that the blowing spray did not cool her face. She felt sure of Norman Erickson now. He had come in terrified, sobbing of a dog. Her memory worked savagely. His own father, Ed Baker, Sutton, Parish, every man she knew except the keeper, had termed him a coward. She herself had called him one the first night. Only once since then had he shown himself at all brave, two weeks ago that was, when she upset the kerosene. But it had been fire then, not storm. Where was he now? Out with the coast guard?

Going with Parish would redeem him a little, but not entirely. He had bawled at a dog.

She saw the skiff put off. She was too late. Turning, she hurried back toward the boilers. There lay the dog in the sand. Yes, a dead dog. Already half buried. She stooped down, soaking her skirts in the water, and straightened out its legs, patting its wet hair, that felt silky under her gentle touch.

"Poor fellow!" she said pityingly. "Good old man! You didn't have a chance!"

She panted on quickly. Where was that Norman? Her father yanked an oar out there in the blackness, in a skiff full of water. Well, if it did upset, it would float, and they could hang to the sides. Captain Samuel Stocking could still swim very well, in spite of his rheumatics. She paused for breath, once more looked out into the vast, black lake.

She could not see the two men heaving with short

oars, just offshore. Captain Stocking, puffing and spitting out spray, felt a wave fill his boots, felt another strike a fisty blow on the back of his neck and fly triumphantly past his head. One, two! One, two! One, two! He counted under his breath. Sutton rowed with a stiffer arm than he, swinging his body lower from the hip, inhaling on each short draw.

Captain Stocking watched carefully over his right shoulder. It paid to be almighty particular along this bit of coast. Just ahead, from the white line of Blind Man's Teeth, water rose in a thousand shooting fountains. The lake screamed a devilish song across the reefs. It threatened with careening breakers, grappled the rotted skiff with the invisible arms of its undertow, practised all its million tricks of sly duplicity and rancorous temper.

Captain Stocking and Steve Sutton rowed doggedly. They had to drop back once during a gust. The next stroke forward they sighted the wreck. She was rolling very little and lying on her port side. A small vessel. A yacht, a power yacht. The skiff thundered against her.

The keeper bobbed forward and gripped her rail. He bellowed abruptly, a sailor's command in his voice. Aboard the other boat a man cried back.

"Quick!" Stocking roared. "Get a move, quick!"

He blinked water from his eyes. He could see the craft better now. She had been hard handled! The decking tipped like a roof, built high forward after the manner of pleasure vessels. The cockpit at the stern wallowed a foot under water. Wind or waves had torn away her awnings. Canvas strips flapped across the bow like wet lashes. A head poked over the side. Steve Sutton, unbending from his seat, gripped the man's shoulders, pulled and slid down suddenly with a big body sprawled across him. The skiff pitched.

"Where's the rest?" Stocking cried.

"I'm alone," the man answered.

He slumped between the thwarts, his left leg trailing overside. Sutton reached forward and pulled him down, until he lay on his back in the bottom of the half-filled boat. He threw one hand, palm up, across his face.

"No crew?" the keeper shouted in his ear.

"Just my dog. . . ."

"He's drownded!" Stocking yelled. "Lay still."

He released the rail of the capsized yacht. Sutton's skiff, flung in a fresh gust, tumbled along a boiling whitecap. It wrenched loggily with its load of water and three men aboard. Captain Stocking grunted.

"There's Parish!"

A sharp beam of light speared the fog. The crew of the coast guard, rolling in their life-boat a hundred fathoms off the rocks, were searching for the wreck.

"Late," the keeper snorted. "Old Parish, proper as a preacher and late as usual." He puffed for breath. "He can't look for a wreck without blindin' a man!"

The searchlight followed for a distance. It lost the black skiff, followed again, poked inquisitively into it, examined the empty yacht, and turned back toward the coast guard station. Sutton rowed jerkily. The keeper's arms ached with the strain. Twenty yards offshore a frothy wave lifted the flat stern of the boat high in the air, throwing its bow under.

The dory braced itself for a moment, then drove its nose skittishly against bottom. It turned over with a graceless handspring antic. Captain Stocking threw up his arms and hit the water flat.

Boots, slicker, sou'wester . . . wind, water, sand . . . coolly, unexcitedly, he struck out with an old-fashioned breast stroke, topped three waves, felt solid bottom under foot, and leaping again with the rollers, he snatched the stranger's collar and dragged him ashore.

Steve Sutton crawled up on his hands and knees, water running out of his mouth. Together they lifted the man. He was heavy. Between them, Sutton panting as noisily as Stocking, they carried him to the lighthouse.

Sue was waiting. Captain Stocking straightened the survivor out upon the parlor couch and poured water from his own boots.

"Well, well," he said, "we made it. . . ."

Norman Erickson opened the outside door and stepped into the room. His clothes dripped with water, his narrow face was an ashy color. He looked ten years older. He glanced uncertainly at Sue, at her father, at Steve Sutton, at the winded stranger on the couch, at his own boots.

"Where've you been?" demanded Sue Stocking.

"I got the coast guard."

"Why didn't you go out with them?"

Norman looked at her silently. Her coal-smudged face blazed with fury. He did not attempt to explain. Old Samuel Stocking clucked his tongue. A spunky girl, Sue. Wouldn't be his if she weren't, but this was a funny time to go picking a fight. A man on the couch with half Lake Michigan in him. He turned to the survivor, ignoring Norman.

"Well, how you feel, shipmate? Pretty much squashed? Never mind the pillow. Leave me capsize you on your stomick. That's better."

The man spoke weakly.

"You saw my dog?"

"Drownded, I tell ye. Erickson, go fetch some clothes, yours ought to fit. Sue, get some hot water. This man's teeth is chattering. And fix up an extra cot on the assistant's side o' the house. You mindin' the steam, Erickson? And, Sue, get me dry socks."

He sat down wearily. He looked extremely mild, as

if it were only a part of a tiresome routine to risk his life at rescue.

"Go 'long, Erickson," he repeated, "get them clothes."

Norman turned, just as the door wrenched open. Captain Parish strode in, his face hard and sharp as a plowshare.

"Got 'em ashore, Sam'l?" he asked. "One? Nobody else?"

"Nobody else," Captain Stocking replied. He added: "Sorry you was late, Josiah."

"Late? And why? 'Count of this skulkin', scart porcupine o' yours! A fine seaman! Livin' here at a self-respectful lighthouse! I asks him to go with me, told him I was short-handed. I asks him, waits the boat for him, and he quit, didn't get in!"

"Quit?" repeated Captain Stocking. He put up his hand to his head bewilderedly. "Go stoke that fire, Erickson. Oh, come, Josiah, I guess he didn't quit. . . ."

"He didn't go!" cried Sue.

CHAPTER XI

THE MAN DELONG

Norman rushed from the room, his face smarting. Sue was partly right this time . . . partly right. He hadn't gone with the boat. He had tried to go. He had fought the lake, had pitted himself against it and had lost. He had done all he could. It was the lake that balked him. It despised him as old Gustaf despised him. It had thrown him ashore disdainfully. It had tossed him scornfully back to the safety of land, and, bellowing, had sought to drown a boat load of sturdy sailing men.

He plunged toward the beach. He had failed, failed before Sue, before Parish, failed before the crew. He had tried. But not hard enough. He had not been quick enough. He had been clumsy. He was not used to life-boats! They knew it! And he had sniveled again over that damned captain's dog!

His oilskin coat caught in a rock and he fell, swearing. His voice was harsh with anger, with self-condemnation when he reeled up. He pulled off the slicker, his hands trembling with emotion, and flung it recklessly against the wind. He had finished with this business! He hurled his sou'wester after the coat . . . he'd go inland to-night . . . have no need for wearing slickers and sou'westers . . . he would live on a farm as Julie Richaud wanted.

Chill wet wind cooled his bare head. The fog signal hooted weakly . . . two short, one long . . . it died out, needing steam. Norman rushed into the signal

house and pommeled the firebox with coal. Here was a job about his size, firing boilers!

The door popped open and Captain Stocking groped into the room. His face flamed red under his thin wet hair, his eyes were blazing. He put on his glasses and peered at the gage, at the assistant keeper with the empty scoop in his hands.

"Erickson," he challenged, "why didn't you go with Parish?"

Norman clattered the scoop to the floor.

"I tried!"

"Tried? Why didn't you go then? Was you scart?" Stocking spoke the word furiously. "Scart? And a drownin' man needin' help five hundred yards offshore!" He pointed a shaking finger. "I believe they was right about you, Erickson! Here I been holdin' up your part all along. I said you wasn't scart, said you'd learn, be a good seaman and a credit to the light. I've told 'em all that! Told Sue, told Baker, told Parish! And now you play an ape! Shame to ye!"

He finished in a long bellow, fists punching the air. Norman backed against the wall. An avalanche of thoughts swept through his head. He remembered his father. That briny, howling old sailor would never let another man talk to his face like this . . . he'd be as hard as ice, would Gustaf, colder than the very lake! He doubled his fists. Sure, he'd been slow, been clumsy, a shame to all the Ericksons! But nobody should tell him so!

"Don't go hollering at me!" he yelled. "I'm not in the coast guard! Nothing in regulations about knowin' how to jump in a boat!"

Captain Stocking spat.

"Nothing in regulations to keep you from knowin' how. Not a word! Parish told you to hurry. Want to see men drown? What you know about regulations?

Less'n Cat-eye McGoogan! What's regulations got to do with being a yaller, no-count scart coward? You best get out this service, boy! You ain't fit!"

"Not fit?"

"Ain't fit to tend a light. Ain't fit to live alongside deep water. Think it's a gal's job, being keeper? Think you never need step in a boat? They's good men in this service, Erickson, none other. You best get out!"

"I'll get out when I'm put out, Mr. Stocking."

"And he's takin' the trouble to insult me with his misters! We'll see! I'll put you out. . . ."

Norman pounded the shovel on the floor.

"And while you're at it, I'll do some talking too," he screamed. "You weren't sure yourself Steve Sutton hadn't seen a ghost! That'll look fine on paper, won't it, a lot of talk about the *Kitty K.*? Who was it first sighted that gas boat? Sue, and then me! And you and Steve Sutton were here inside, sticking your heads under the coal pile!"

He banged the shovel into the corner, picked it up and flung it down again.

"Comes to resigning from this service, comes to putting me out, I'll have some talking to do," he shouted. "You'll have a fine time getting rid of me, old man! I'll stick now, I will, till hell turns Methodist! I'll do some talking if there's talk to be done, and damned to you!"

Captain Stocking listened speechlessly. He scratched his head. His assistant's rage had cooled his own.

"No such disgraceful, brawly language in my signal house, Erickson. I'll stand for none of it. What you're in need of, I mind, is redemption. Redemption and a clout on the ear to learn ye respect. Get away from me. I need some decent atmosphere to think in. Get away! Go to the house!"

Norman plunged out recklessly. He collided with the door going through it. In the air, that was clearing of fog, he ran twice across the length of the reservation. The wind had dropped in the last hour, spatters of rain blew again from the north. He waded through beach grass, stumbling on stones, with no course to his feet. He saw his sou'wester washed up on a jag of rock. Let it stay there! He didn't want it. But he should not go inland. Not with Samuel Stocking threatening to make him!

He slammed the front door to the keeper's quarters and stamped down the corridor to his own room. He heard a man talking in the parlor and Sue Stocking's laugh. Norman recognized Baker's voice. Its bluster stiffened him. Baker had lost little time in getting over from the coast guard station!

"His old man's daft," the new member of Parish's crew was saying, "but he's a right brave seaman!"

Norman trod noisily down the hall. He knew of whom Baker gabbled with such a superior air. Of course old Gustaf was a right brave seaman!

A sulky rainy gleam from the lantern tower shone into his bedroom. Without lighting his lamp, he slid out of his wet clothes and hunted dry ones. He rubbed himself down with a towel. He had said aplenty to old Samuel Stocking out there in the signal house! But not too much. Drive him out the service, eh?

He heard Sue Stocking call him: "Erickson!"

"Yes!"

"You're not going to bed?"

"I am not."

"Will you come out here a minute?"

"What you want of me?"

"I? I don't want you! Goodness knows I never want to look at you again. It's the man Delong."

Norman stumbled into his shoes in the dark of his

room. Of course she didn't want him. Lord knew she'd shown more spunk to-night than he had.

"Delong?" he asked.

"The man father brought in."

Norman weighed this in silence. Delong. Not a name loved back in the hills.

"I'll be out," he answered.

He dressed slowly. Delong. He knew the name. It was a city fellow called Delong who bought the old Swallow place up Tamarack River way a few years ago, after the Swallows, father, son, aye and even grandfather, had spent half their lives draining the swamp. This Delong . . . not *this* Delong probably, but some one by that name . . . came in with a sack of money and bought it. Paid cash, built a dam across the river, and backed up the water to form a lake. A gentleman farmer. Well, there was one thing worse than being afraid of storms . . . damn it, he'd never be afraid of another . . . one thing worse, and that was hiring all the work done on a farm. It took Germaine Richaud to tell what he thought of critters like that. Well, why argue with names?

He strode into the Stocking parlor. The man lay on the couch. Norman recognized his own brown sweater around his shoulders, his own blue flannel shirt showing underneath it. Not until that minute did he remember the clothes the keeper had ordered him to fetch. . . . Sue must have got them. He looked anxiously from the stranger to Baker. The latter was planted securely in the middle of the floor, still talking. Water spread in puddles from his wet boots. Norman swallowed. Baker had the air of a hero where he stood, sou'wester pushed back, yellow slicker open, showing bronze buttons under it; short, swarthy, with his flat face; smiling, as if he had gripped in solitary combat with the lake, and the lake had lost.

"What you want of me?" Norman asked the stranger abruptly.

The man looked up with a grave face. He was a tall heavy individual with red hair. The brown work trousers that he wore were Norman's too; he had rolled them part way up from one long leg and was steaming his ankle in hot water. Sue stood near by with an empty pitcher and an armful of white cloth. She paid no attention to Norman. Sutton, who still wore his wet clothes . . . he owned no others . . . was drinking hot coffee from a blue handled cup. There was a sly childish look in his eyes.

"What do you want?" Norman asked again.

"This is Mr. Erickson, the assistant keeper," Sue Stocking explained indifferently.

"Him as wouldn't go," added Ed Baker.

The stranger coughed. There was a certain warm friendliness in his eyes. He put out his right hand and Norman took it. The act reassured him a little. The stranger's hands were large, but soft, as if he never had worked out-of-doors with them. He was not old; under forty. Norman had seen a few such men, big, well muscled and just the right weight. A brown leather sea-jacket hung over a chair drying. At the foot of the couch stood a pair of wet boots.

"Did you happen to find anything on the beach to-night?" he asked.

Norman hesitated. The man's voice was aggressive. But it also was friendly. Norman liked it at once.

"He asks did you find anything a-lyin' on the beach," repeated Sutton.

"I heard him," answered Norman. "Yes, sir, I did find something."

"What?" Delong braced himself up on one elbow. "What did you find?"

"A dead dog," Norman said.

Sutton gaped, while Ed Baker laughed. Sue Stocking turned around angrily. Her cheeks blazed red.

"Don't try to be funny, Erickson," she warned, "you've been funny enough for one night."

"Who's funny?" Norman's voice swelled in his throat. "I'm answering a question with a decent tongue, which is more than I get out of the lot of you. I found a dead dog, Mr. Delong. Drowned."

The stranger nodded.

"He was a good dog," he answered mildly.

Norman started. He felt blood rush to his cheeks. Those were his father's words! "A good dog!" He stood up straight, aware that Sutton and Baker were grinning at him.

"He looked it, sir. He ought to have swum better, a big dog like that. It upset me, seeing him. If it hadn't been for that dog, I'd have been all right." He clipped off his words, like the exhaust of an engine. "I sighted the wreck, sir," he went on eagerly, conscious all the time that he should stop, "Sutton here was ballyhooin' about then, swore your lights was an old *Kitty K.* Baker didn't sight you. He was sitting comfortable inside, reading a newspaper when I broke in on him. . . ."

"That's enough for you, Erickson!" Sue interrupted sharply.

"You didn't find a pack, an oilskin pack?" Delong inquired.

"I didn't," Norman replied stiffly, "all I found was the dog."

Baker laughed. "I best get out on the job again," he said easily. "Capt'n put me on watch down there by the wreck. I'll let you know, mister, if anything comes ashore."

"You will keep your eye open?" the stranger asked.

"Sure. . . ."

Sue shook her head.

"Your package has sunk before this, Mr. Delong," she said. "It would be too heavy to float ashore. Wait, Ed, I'll get you another cup of coffee."

She left the room quickly, avoiding Norman. Well, he could do without coffee. Do without any of these people . . . he strode through the door and across the sand to the signal house. Captain Stocking stood bareheaded on the path, peering north at the weather.

"Clearing up?" Norman shouted.

"Yes. Let the steam go down. Turn off the automatic."

The keeper had softened his anger, but his tone still was chilly. He left Norman on the walk and trudged heavily into the house.

It was two by the clock in the signal shanty. Norman turned off the mechanism that controlled the steam whistle and stepped back out-of-doors. It was lonely on the beach, but just now he craved loneliness. All terror of storm had passed from his mind, died with the dying wind. There remained only a hungry dull sickness, a hatred of all who had seen his shame, a hatred of himself.

Rain beat like sand on his face. He walked northward, his cold hands in his pockets. Blind Man's Eye glared down reproachfully at him. He turned his back to it, and wading through wet grass, climbed the little dune behind the house, turned to the left, and sought a small hollow where the wind did not penetrate. A brush of scrub cedars loomed up ahead, blacker than the rest of the night landscape. Here the sound of the surf was deadened a little. Here, in the shelter of cedars, an old oak plank, salvaged from a dead ship, had been staked up roughly to make a quiet and secluded seat. Here Sue and he had talked one afternoon for an hour when he first came to the light.

He sat down miserably. He needed to think over this whole catastrophe. But what was there to think over? He could expect nothing here on the point except scorn. He had proved himself a coward in the eyes of keeper and coast guard crew. Being a coward was unforgivable. He could never make Sue Stocking understand about the schooner *Gottland* and the captain's dog. She might not grasp how a man could carry some hideous dream always with him, and yet not be a coward.

Julie? Lord, had it been only that afternoon he smelled the soil of the Richaud farm back in the hills? He believed Julie would comprehend what had happened to him . . . but he couldn't agree to farm. He couldn't leave the light. After what old Samuel Stocking had threatened? Well, what could he do? Neither land nor lake wanted him. A wave of nostalgia overwhelmed him, a passion like homesickness for a place he never had seen.

He arose with stiff legs after an hour, and facing into the wind, climbed over the sand hummock to the beach. The sky had cleared in the north. Already there was a hint of day. Out upon Blind Man's Teeth the capsized yacht made a gray and black patch, with white breakers stretching high arms above it. On the shore, not a hundred paces off, an electric flashlight shone for a gusty second, snapped out, lighted, once more snapped out. It was Ed Baker, no doubt, on watch by the wreck. Norman stood motionless.

It would not do to meet Baker now . . . would not do at all. He might not be master of his passions if he met him out here. There was a killing air on the wind. He backed away.

The surfman approached. It was Baker all right; light from the tower gleamed in streaks on his wet sagging oilskins. Ten feet off he halted and knelt down

beside a drift log. Norman held his breath. Why was Baker digging in the sand with his hands?

The surfman stood up and walked swiftly back to his post. Norman shook his cold legs. And what was this new business? Something queer. Another light, a lantern this time, moved along the wash beyond Keeper Stocking's quarters. Baker waved his own flash toward it.

"Oh, Shay!" he hallooed.

"Three-thirty," the relief man called. "Cap Parish says come in, dry off, get some sleep."

The two guards talked quietly for a moment. Then Ed Baker started back toward the coast guard station. He must pass the lighthouse on the way.

" 'Night, Baker," Shay cried after him.

The new guard turned down the wick in his lantern, stood it for safe keeping by a piece of wreckage, and started to patrol in the dark.

Norman waited five minutes before he stepped out of the brush. He crossed swiftly to the log where Baker had knelt, and searched with his fingers in the sand. Baker did not take much time; therefore he must not have dug very deep. In half a minute the assistant keeper touched a wet object, too soft for wood.

He cleared away the sand and withdrew an oblong packet. It measured a fair ten inches in length, half that in width, and bulged thick. It was bound with soggy cord. Norman wiped off the drops of water that clung to its oilskin surface and thrust it into a pocket of his coat.

For a second time in his life he had discovered Baker in an act of thievery. And both times he had stood by silently. As a boy he had taken his beating and said nothing. It had been pride kept him from telling that other time, pride and a ridiculous juvenile fear of what Baker might say. He need have no fear of Baker now.

Only a loathing for him. Baker who played the hero and who was only a common thief! What would Sue Stocking say? And Captain Samuel? And Parish?

It came to him swiftly that it did not matter what they might say. For he could not tell them.

He had no witnesses. Baker would claim that he lied, and be believed undoubtedly.

But the stranger must have his package. Should he give it to him and let Baker know thereby that he had seen him bury it in the sand? Baker would smart under that treatment; it would be torture to him to know that Norman knew.

Surfman Shay still patrolled the shore. The light of Blind Man's Eye looked down languidly at his muscular back and into the face of Norman Erickson. It showed no surprise. What surprise could there be in the unimportant affairs of unimportant men, after watchful years upon that coast? Blind Man's Eye was an old, old light. Great deeds, splendid heroism, immense cowardice, the clamor of an enraged and spiteful creation, the restless exertion that men call life, succumbing at last to the obstinate demand of death, wet death, sandy death, death in a tatter of wind ripped rags . . . these had marched before the incurious gaze of Blind Man's Eye like ants across a rock. Why should an old fixed white light tremble or wink when one obscure coastman discovers another entirely as obscure in the performance of a mean and petty trickery?

Norman kicked the sand out of his boots and tramped back to the house.

CHAPTER XII

THE OILSKIN PACKET

THE door to the keeper's quarters stood open. The light of a lamp in its corridor pushed out through the rain. The fog signal was silent. Norman glanced off to the northwest. He could make out no sign of the light on Battle Ax Island; there must still be fog up that way. Farther north, a long distance, a cautious steamer mumbled. It was thick in that direction too; Blind Man's Eye might have to start the signal again before morning. Captain Stocking scuffed up the walk.

Norman stepped aside to let him pass. The keeper did not want to pass. He wanted to talk. He hung upon his heels, scratched his wet chin, gave his throat a mighty clearing.

"Where you been?" he asked.

"Walking."

"No time to walk. Time to go to bed. You're due to take watch in two hours."

"I'm not going to bed."

"Lookie here, Erickson!" Captain Stocking knocked out his pipe, the better to make plain his words. "I ain't forgot what you said in the signal house. I ain't likely to forget. And I expects you to remember what I told you! There's two or three kinds of things to scare folks. And when you've lived as long as I have ashore and afloat, you'll find there's lots o' things ain't to be explained. Not with the newspapers and the high-school teachers and the inspectors and everybody else

doin' their smartest to explain 'em. And the *Kitty K.* is one of them, Erickson. She ain't never been explained. Some night you'll see her, mark me. She's a three-stick schooner, kind of hazy like, off there in the Teeth. Ain't a seaman on this point ain't seen her. Ask Parish, down at the coast guard. He made out the skipper one night . . . he's got a long whisker and sits on the fluke of an old schooner, hollerin' a chantey. . . .''

''Rats and dogfish!''

''Aye, and ye can rats me to the content of ye! I've seen things, lad, that'd put icicles on your nose if ye had wits enough to understand 'em. I've seen dead men a-walkin', and widows havin' the vision, and a sight o' things it ain't fair to gospel to tell of. And I know when they's a spell on a place or a man or a vessel. And I've no mind to go runnin' down a haunt or mixin' my fingers in the devil's business. But there's one thing sure!''

''What?'' asked Norman.

''And what? Listen, lad.'' The keeper's voice was grave. ''I never run from a bit of a blow in my life, so help me! I never run from water nor wind nor dogs, and I never stayed ashore when they was askin' for volunteers to go out to a distress! Parish needed hands to-night. You couldn't jump in the boat. Lor' knows why. You can make a funny mouth about the *Kitty K.*, if it's no more sense than you got. But remember, I will write my report. Captain Parish will have a story, too, which ain't goin' to be pretty. And you an assistant keeper! Go in the house. Get a bit of rest. Be set to relieve me.''

''I'm set now,'' Norman growled.

He could feel no sting from the keeper's rebuke. Nothing old Stocking said mattered much. He had called himself just as many kinds of fool as Stocking

could. He had not been afraid to go in the boat. The devilish lake prevented it. But he had been a coward earlier. Yes, about that dog! Out there in the rain he had denounced himself. What more could any one else say?

He walked gloomily into the house. Ed Baker stood again in the parlor, explaining to Sue that he had stopped on his way off beach patrol.

"And I watched close," he told Delong, "but I didn't see a sign of your package. I told my relief to keep his eye peeled. Not much chance though, sir."

Norman, lingering in the corridor, felt the soft wet pack in his pocket.

"Is it worth a good deal?" Baker asked.

The stranger coughed.

"No," he said, "it is worth a great deal to me, but to nobody else. I'd be willing to pay a good reward for it. Of course, it may still be in the yacht. But I swear I had it in my hand when I tumbled into that skiff."

Norman walked in calmly. Steve Sutton dozed in the captain's chair. Sue, looking sleepy, lifted her eyes to Norman's face and without recognition lowered them again. The stranger still sat bundled on the couch, with his bandaged ankle resting on a stool. Conversation stopped automatically.

Mr. Delong was the first one to speak.

"Hello, young fellow," he said.

"Hello," Norman answered. His face relaxed. It was pleasant to have one man on the coast speak to him without scorn.

Delong smiled at him, and then, one at a time, he examined the faces of the others, as if setting himself right about them.

"You live here at the light?" he asked Sutton.

"No, I don't." The fisherman looked up in surprise, trying to see what meaning there was in the

question. He perceived it, and started home. At the door he paused.

"Well, Baker, there's a certain beachcomber I know has one rescue to his credit," he said sullenly, "and a coast guard with his fancy buttons don't have any yet."

Baker made a sound that did for laughter. He turned bruskly and went out with Sutton. Norman looked after the pair. There was bad blood between those two. And neither one cared a broken rudder for him. Let them fight it out between them. . . .

Sue spoke.

"Your bed is ready, Mr. Delong," she explained, "through that door, on the assistant keeper's side." She did not look at Norman. "Sleep as late as you want."

The man shrugged.

"You coast folk have strong wills," he said, making an effort to stand, "if you can sleep after all this. I'm a bit upset, Miss Stocking. This isn't an every-day affair to me. Getting wrecked, losing my dog, my boat, my whole sheaf of documents, getting rescued, and then this."

"What?" Sue's voice was inclined to be on edge.

"Such husky talk. Your friends' calling each other cowards. So many compliments I've heard this evening. . . ." He looked at Norman as if the assistant keeper's troubles interested him.

"Sit up here if you wish," Sue hurried to say. "This oil will last all night. There's an extra blanket right behind you."

"Thanks. I'll read something."

Delong hobbled from the couch to a chair. He adjusted the stool, until his foot was propped comfortably on it, then picked up the government report on lighthouses and, turning his back to the lamp, began to read. Norman sat down wearily in Captain Stocking's big rocker and stretched out his wet legs. His feet were

swollen. But the keeper's watch would be ended soon and he would have to make his own inspection. Couldn't take off his boots until then. He closed his eyes.

Captain Stocking strode through the outer door in five minutes. His nose glowed redder than ever. He screwed his eyes into tight little buttons, as if he had been mauling over unpleasant thoughts.

"Turning in," he said shortly to Norman. Then he saw Delong. "Oh, mister, there's a bed fixed up for you."

"I'd rather sit up, Captain."

"Be your own skipper," Stocking agreed. "A good night to ye."

Norman limped out to do his inspection. Waves still ground through Blind Man's Teeth. He walked lamely around to the fog signal house, fingering the wet pack in his coat, and turned toward the tower. He climbed slowly to the service room under the lantern, made his notation in the open log book, wound the chronometer, examined the barometer, and mounted the iron ladder to the lantern.

Everything was going smoothly. No longer did the light ever worry him. Why should it, with a trustworthy lamp that rarely needed attention aside from cleaning and lighting? He recalled Captain Stocking's stories of the old lights, when there were wicks to trim and a thousand other nuisances. Better, this. He felt a fondness for Blind Man's Eye. Certainly there was one thing of which people could not accuse him; he never had neglected the light.

Down on the plank walk he stopped again and felt the packet that was lying like a lump against him. The night's terrible business seemed an old tale except for this. What would he do with it?

Again he considered possibilities. He might tell the

truth. He put that thought away at once, as an ordeal which would only stir up more trouble. He could drop the bundle in the hall. And need then answer his own share in the hubbub of questions. Only one thing was certain. He didn't want any one to catch him with it in his pocket.

He sniffed the air unconsciously. The smell of wet rocks and torn seaweed, the smell of Lake Michigan after turmoil struck across the point. The wind was freshening again. Above, in empty blackness, clouds were moving in thick battalions, he could tell from the wind and the inked-in stars. They cut apart for a moment and one bolt of lightning spit out sharply, ripped toward the lake, and drowned itself. The flash was like a short hot curse in its intensity. In its one second of passage, the earth turned midday.

Norman was staring southward. He saw the wet sides of the tower as the bolt fell. On the rocks a frothy breaker froze midway in its leap, its edges standing up hard as salt crystals. The horizon came into accurate being for the second, and immediately ceased to exist. The fog signal shack blew a tiny plume of smoke from its funnel, a bent plume, twisting down the wind, yet motionless as the funnel itself. The windows of the keeper's dwelling mimicked the flash.

And up the beach, perhaps two hundred paces, his left foot lifted, head down, arms at his sides, in the attitude of a man running, but carved out in motionless relief against the black surface of the water, Norman saw Ed Baker again. He heard Baker's feet slap the sand as he ran past. He did not stop. Norman puzzled, and then, realizing where Baker was going, laughed aloud. Baker would find a cold surprise, digging under that log for the packet. He went into the house.

The stranger was not reading. He sat by the brass parlor lamp, sucking thoughtfully at an unlighted pipe.

"Tobacco wet, sir?" Norman asked. "Here's cigarettes."

"Thanks."

"And here's a thing I found up the beach. Might this be yours?" He removed the packet from his uniform coat. "This what you were wanting?" he repeated.

The man made no answer at first. His eyes were glued to the bundle. It was a plain, businesslike envelope of oilskin, fastened with red twine and one rubber band, with the initials "J. D."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he said abruptly. He laid the cigarette unlighted on the base of the parlor lamp. "Where'd you get it?" he asked.

"Guess it washed ashore," Norman answered, "up the beach."

The other took it. He examined the red strings carefully. His bandaged ankle bumped the floor as he reached forward. He grunted from pain, and asked the assistant keeper for a knife. Upon the parlor table, after he had cut the red strings, he poured out a damp stream of coarse, dry, beach sand.

"Sand," he murmured.

He opened the envelope slowly. More sand spilled out. He frowned when he saw it. The papers were soggy but the sand was dry. He picked them up carefully, each by a corner, and started to spread them upon the polished surface of the oak table. Norman, remembering the time his own wet gloves had left their mark on that varnish, and what Samuel Stocking said afterward, brought a newspaper to protect the polished oak. Delong laid the documents upon it. He picked up one of them and examined it closely. It had lain on top. Near its upper edge there was the round, smudgy mark of a finger or thumb.

Delong put this paper aside from the others. In so

doing, he saw the cigarette Norman had given him. He picked it up, accepted Norman's match, lighted the cigarette, puffed twice indolently, and restored it, burning, to the edge of the brass lamp.

Then he turned swiftly.

"You don't look like a liar," he warned Norman. "I should know one when I see him. That's part of my job, telling liars from honest men. You didn't find this 'just up the beach.' Besides, it's been opened. Sure, it has . . . there's a finger-mark of some kind, looks oily. And the string was in a hard knot. I didn't have it tied that way. I had a bow knot. Somebody undid it, and tied it up again." He brushed the sand into his left palm and rubbed it with his finger. "What's more, this sand is perfectly dry," he said. "It came off the beach. Wasn't washed into the envelope from the lake. If it had been, it would be wet and sticky. This bundle was buried after it rolled ashore. Why?"

"I don't know," Norman muttered.

"You admit that it was?" Delong swung his big body about in his chair and tipped the lamp shade so that the light fell on Norman's face. "This is funny business," he said. "Know anything about psychology, young man? Well, no matter, you're just as well off. But answer this. Would the same person hide a thing one minute, and the next dig it up and bring it to its owner?"

"The same person didn't."

"Oh," said Delong. He smiled. "That's what I thought, Erickson. Who buried it?"

"Who?"

"Yes, sir, who?"

"It was dark. . . ."

"Who buried it?"

"I tell you, sir, it was too dark to see. I was walking, sir, trying to cool off . . . it's been a wildcat of a

night!" Norman paused, conscious it was Sue who first had called it a wildcat night. He felt Delong's eyes burning into his own. They were hard but not unkindly. He liked this man. "I saw a fellow stoop down and bury something," he confessed, "I hid till . . . till his relief come along . . ." he caught himself . . . "till he went away," he corrected, "then I dug it up."

"Wait a minute. Get that straight. You said his relief. That means he was in the coast guard."

Norman flushed. This man was too quick for him. He twisted thoughts right out of one's head, made them into words, asked questions one couldn't crawl around. He acted like a lawyer, like the one from Traverse City when old Hogface Peabody got extradited for tampering with the mails.

"Are you a lawyer?" he asked bluntly.

Delong laughed. The muscles of his face relaxed. "Yes," he admitted.

"Then I guess you're just what I need!"

The stranger picked up his cigarette. He paid no attention to the stain it left on the brass lamp. Norman smiled at that, forgetting for a moment his own worries. Wait till Sue discovered the smoke stain on the lamp! She'd blame Sutton.

"I believe you're telling the truth," the other said, "only not all of it. But you don't need a lawyer. All you need is a little cool thinking."

"Think cool? In this pack of porcupines?"

Delong shook his head good-humoredly.

"You people certainly keep busy paying each other compliments. You sound like a criminal law court." He finished his cigarette. "What's been the matter with you to-night? Frightened?"

"Not exactly . . . yes, sure I was, scared half to death. . . ."

"I was too."

"You?"

"Out on that reef, with the boat sinking under me? Of course I was! Who wouldn't be? I had no idea where I was, a mile from shore or ten miles. I had a right to be afraid."

Norman caught at the word.

"A right to be?" he demanded.

"Certainly. All men have a right to be afraid. Don't let anybody tell you any different. Only a fool isn't afraid under some circumstances. When the danger's great, every man alive is afraid, unless he's too thick mentally. It's how you act that counts, how you act when you're so scared you think you can't take another breath."

Norman stared at him. Bravery and cowardice never had been presented to him as such involved affairs. It had not occurred to him that a man could be afraid without being a coward. Even now, with hope rising quickly within him, he only half believed it.

"It was your damned dog . . ." he began brokenly.

"My dog?" Delong leaned forward. "Needn't call him a damned dog, Erickson. He was pretty much all right. Never had a dog yourself?"

"Once. Somebody poisoned him."

"Then why are you scared of dogs?"

"I'm not! Not of live ones . . . it's a dead dog in the water . . . oh, I can't explain it. It made me think . . ."

"Of what?"

"Of a story."

"Oh!" Delong's voice held a touch of triumph. "A story?" he repeated.

For half an hour the assistant keeper talked. Now and then Delong interrupted with a word, a question

or a quick exclamation. Norman told of his big, sea-loving father and his little French mother, of the schooner *Gottland* and the captain's dog. He told it word for word as he had heard his father tell it; he omitted nothing, no period, no inflection, no oath, not even Gustaf's bitter laugh. He slipped without realizing into his father's odd minor singsong, which gave the tale its appalling quality. A matter-of-fact brevity marked his words. His sentences were short, like jabbing breakers, or long and rolling like Gustaf's wide crashing seas. When he had done Delong said: "God!" and was silent a full minute.

"I know," he admitted finally, "I know exactly how that dog affected you. I saw a man hanged once when I was a law student. It was years before I could look at a knotted rope. Tell me what happened next, at Madrid, up at your home."

Norman possessed a warm sense that this red-haired stranger was sympathetic to him. You could talk to a man like this. He knew how to take what you said. He fitted in words when you stumbled, the right word every time. He knew exactly what you were thinking. Another hour Norman talked. He told of his summers on his grandfather's farm, of the cold, windy, uncomfortable house on the beach, of his mother's death. He told of his father's pride in the name Erickson, of his unreasoning shame in Norman's wagon job, how Gustaf called him "a-feared," and "no son to me"; how Gustaf, at length, had driven him out.

He concluded by saying:

"Baker called me a yellow-bellied pickerel after the boat got off to-night. I don't know, maybe that's what I am. I can't get it worked out right in my head."

Delong reached for another cigarette. He lighted it, then holding the match, stared at the flame until it burned his fingers.

"I wonder," he said at last, "if there's a man alive with steady enough nerves not to be afraid at some time or other. Take the way I was to-night out there on the reef. Scared? Lord, I was scared! Nobody along but my dog . . . my crew deserted." He smiled. "He was a fellow named Mulligan. I picked him up at Grand Haven. All he wanted was a trip to Manistee, I guess. At least he left me there. I came on alone. Ever hear that old song about 'I'm the cook and the captain bold'? Well, I thought of it a good many times before I piled up on the reef."

"You haven't much sailor sense," Norman told him with conviction. "Nobody goes out much alone, not for long trips, that is. Not even my father. He never lifts nets alone. And he's a storm sense, too, knows when it's coming."

"So has my brother," the lawyer said. Norman caught pride in his tone. He felt Delong was purposely changing the subject. He fell in with it.

"Your brother a sailor?"

"A farmer. Fruit farmer. His name is Fritz. We own an orchard in the hills."

The assistant keeper started. Fritz was the name he had heard Germaine growl about. So this was the same Delong! He was disappointed to find it out. He had hoped this friendly man was not of that family. He seemed to have too much sense to have built that great lake up there in the hills . . . why, it was a quarter as large as Ottowa! Any fool in the peninsula knew it couldn't last. Those dikes the Delongs had built . . . more than half sand . . . they'd give way some hard rain and there'd be a flood wiping out the bottoms.

"Was it you dammed the Tamarack?" he asked bluntly.

The other nodded.

"My brother Fritz and I. He came up here first.

Doctors sent him to the country. He got the idea for the lake. It's what makes our place valuable now."

"It's the lake that's going to bust through some day and drown a lot of people."

"Break through our dam?" Delong's laugh sounded out of place in the middle of the night in the lighthouse parlor.

Norman shook his head uncertainly.

"It took ten years to get that swamp drained," he explained. "Old man Swallow bought the place when it was just so much slash, after the timbering was done. He drained it, set out the trees, had everything going nice when along you came and spoilt it. If that dam ever gives, there's going to be a lot of drowned cows and hen-coops a-floating down the valley. Everybody knows that back on the Tamarack. The river's just a trickle now in dry weather, just a trickle coming over your spillway. If it ever lets loose all at once, it'll be catastrophe, folks say."

"They're wrong."

Again Norman shook his head.

"I don't think so, sir. It's not safe, penning up water that way."

"It's safe as a mud puddle! That lake makes water-power for our lighting plant and it fills an ugly hole. That bottom land was all gravel, worthless for farming. Nothing would grow in it. So why not have something good to look at? I'm going to build a house up there, some day."

Norman listened to him critically. The lawyer seemed sure of himself.

"I hope you're right, sir," he said. "There's fine folks in the valley down below. Good friends of mine." He thought of Germaine Richaud, growling just that noon of the Tamarack River. It was from Germaine he had got most of his idea of that Delong lake. Ger-

maine hated any water. Maybe he was wrong about this dam. Norman looked at the clock.

"Time for inspection," he exclaimed, putting on his shoes. He stood up awkwardly. "Thanks, sir," he said, "thanks for listening to me."

He slid out into the rain to make his patrol. This night's business would start a nice smoke up in the hills. And in Madrid Bay. His father was right about his not coming back to Madrid now. But he'd return sometime; when he could return unashamed. That might be a long time, but he'd go, if Delong was right. He liked this stranger; something about the fellow made him feel like a man.

He stoked and banked the fire that still smoldered under the boilers in the signal house, tested the water and steam gages, and climbed to the top of the tower. A new fog was creeping down across the water. Spray clouded the glass of the lantern. Water dripped with a tinny sound upon the cast-iron decking outside. At Madrid Bay the dim pier-head light that half an hour ago showed sulky red across the water, had slipped back out of sight. Thick weather. The shore might be in for a siege of it.

Returning to the boiler room he stoked the fire again, opened the drafts, watched the mounting arrow of the pressure gage, and set off the small clockwork mechanism that regulated the signal.

Two short, one long, two short . . . once again lifted the voice of Blind Man's Eye. Battle Ax signal answered it, far out across the lake. Northward, still more distant, cried the siren on South Manitou Island. An ore barge began to grunt as it marched slowly down the channel, six miles offshore.

Norman returned to the house. Captain Stocking was waiting in the parlor, his boots under his arm, his cold pipe in his teeth, and a scowl on his fat sleepy face.

He looked at his assistant suspiciously. His manner irritated Norman. He guessed that Delong had told him of the packet.

"Thickenin' up again?" the keeper asked.

Norman nodded. His own watch was over for the night. But the keeper plainly needed more sleep.

"Where you find this man's bundle?" Stocking asked abruptly.

"Up the beach."

"That's a wide latitude. Come, where you find it?"

"He's explained that to me satisfactorily," Delong interrupted. "It washed ashore, Erickson found it, and brought it in. Oh, it's mine, all right . . . see . . . J. D."

Captain Stocking put on his glasses.

"What's that stand for?" he inquired.

"James Delong."

"Your name's Jim?"

Delong laughed, kicked out his sprained ankle, swore and looked at Captain Stocking, who clucked his tongue. "Name's Jim?" the keeper repeated.

"Some folks call me that."

"Humph! I never had a fancy for the name Jim. Where's your home port?"

"Grand Haven."

The lightkeeper grunted.

"And I don't fancy that, either. I was blowed ashore there once, good reason for not likin' it!" He paused, looking at the papers on the table. "Your packet open when you got it?" he demanded.

"No," Delong answered.

"Been opened?"

"Yes," he admitted.

"Was? How you know that?"

"I've told you all that's necessary," Delong said, "but if you want to know more . . ." he reached to

the table and picked up the document with the smudgy mark on its corner. "There's proof, sir. See that smudge? Oily. This paper was handled by some one who had oil on his hands recently . . . paper's damp or it would have made an excellent finger-print. . . ."

"You, Erickson? You have oil on your hands? Might have had, plenty chance for oil around the fog house!"

"Erickson didn't open it."

"How you know? Erickson, let's see your hands!"

"Come, come, Captain Stocking!" Delong chided.

Norman stared at the keeper stubbornly; then put his hands into his pockets.

"They're clean," he said quietly, "you couldn't tell anything by my hands. Might have been oily. Probably were. I washed them just a little while ago . . . lots of men here on this point get oil on their hands . . ."

"Who?" the keeper took off his glasses excitedly. "Who, I ask ye?"

"Why, you yourself, Captain," Delong said. "Here . . . wait a minute, I wouldn't get so upset! I know it wasn't you. I judge there are several other men around here who handle engines. . . ."

"Engines? You say engines?" The keeper stopped his dancing as suddenly as he had begun it. He sat down thoughtfully. "Engines," he repeated. "Well, well . . ." He turned on Norman; "time for my watch?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," Norman answered, "but I can stand it."

"Go do it," Captain Stocking bade, "call me afore sunup. And don't come bustin' back in here, Erickson. I want to talk a few minutes with this fellow."

Norman retreated. Waves were slapping headlong against the shore, breaking with cryptic exclamations upon unexpected shelves of rock. Captain Stocking waited by the window until his assistant had run down

the walk. He shook his head once. Then he rubbed his glasses savagely.

"Guess you feel fit to talk sense now, mister, and I expects an answer, all shipshape and proper. What'd you have in this bundle?"

"Deeds."

"Deeds?"

"I own a share in a farm up in the hills. There have been titles under litigation. I just had the papers straightened up."

"No money?"

"In that envelope? No!"

"Erickson didn't take nothin' out'n it?"

"That boy? Oh, no! That's all settled, Captain. He's explained the whole thing to my liking."

"Ain't explained it to mine! Who got that dirty mark on that paper? Where'd Erickson have that packet? Why didn't he bring it in afore, when we all was talkin' about it?"

"He didn't say, Captain Stocking."

"Didn't say? He'll say to me! I won't have such doings around my vessel, I won't. First he's got the green scare, worse'n Jonah's widow. Acted like a summer resorter. Then he hollers at me like a blasted shark . . . I'd no mind the language he's got the capabilities of. Then he goes stealin' your money or helpin' somebody else steal it . . . got scared out, most likely. . . ."

"It wasn't money. And he didn't try to steal it. In fact, if any one did try it, Erickson prevented it."

"Eh? By the hoky poky!" Captain Stocking sank down into his rocking chair. "How'd *he* know somebody was tryin' to steal it? How'd he know?"

"He didn't tell me," Delong answered. "In fact, Erickson told me very little, only brought the package in and gave it to me. But I've an idea of my own. The

boy's all right, Captain. Nothing to worry about there."

The keeper snorted.

"You got a lubberly idee of what's right, mister! You might think different was you to have the trimmin' of that split spar for a time! Trouble, trouble, ever since he come here, and now more of it since *you* come! But I got to write my report, mister. I can't leave unchancy happenings yaw around loose forever. You reports your packet lost. Coast guard's lookin' for it. I'm lookin' for it. Then it pops up, and you batten your hatch like a missioner. Who was it drug you off the Teeth out there? Who was it saved your life? Who brung you ashore and give you coffee and raised you from the drownded? Me, I tell you! And I asks you a question, civil and polite and decent, and you have no answer for me! Where'd that barnacle o' mine get that packet? What you mean by stealin'? By Skillagallee, I'll find out! Now listen. Who got that dirty finger-mark there on that paper? What you drivin' at, talkin' about engines?"

The red-haired man laughed.

"Think we'll have rain, Keeper?" he asked.

CHAPTER XIII

JIM NELSON SAYS "NO"

James Delong spent four days at Blind Man's Eye. For seventy damp, almost windless hours, a pasty fog hung about the coast, shutting out land and water, magnifying all sounds until even Sue Stocking's voice possessed the bravado of a second mate's bellow. The fog signal cannonaded faithfully in a wide-mouthed uproar. Between times rain fell.

It fell with a persistent spatter, broke off, suggesting that it was finished forever, and recommenced with refreshed vigor. Day and night its fingers drummed an intermittent tattoo upon the slate roof of the house, upon the drenched sand grass of the gullied beach, upon the inclined and slippery sides of the white tower. Now and then, when the lower mists parted, frenzied clouds were seen streaking out of the northeast, for the wind had returned to that quarter.

"So long as she holds like this," Captain Stocking grumbled as he clanged down the coal scoop, "it'll be twenty-four hour trick and no watch below. Nor'eas'! A nor'easter's a dirty wind, always."

Norman Erickson went about his duties punctually after his talk with Delong. The keeper offered him only short commands and asked only official questions. The two men divided the watches evenly day and night. Each stood his trick, called the other promptly, and did not mention again the matter of the oilskin package or Norman's collapse the evening of the storm. Norman

did not resent the keeper's silence. He knew that the other was not a man who bore grudges; Stocking considered him a coward . . . he had told him so plainly . . . but in regard to the bundle of papers, Norman felt hazily that Delong had convinced the keeper.

Captain Parish and his crew put a line aboard the yacht after the wind fell, and dragged her off the reef. She sank at once by the stern into the deeper water. With Steve Sutton's old capstan and a score of newly peeled cedar poles, they rolled her up the beach. She measured thirty-eight feet over all, a good sea boat, broad of beam, shallow drafted, her engine compartment and living quarters well fitted. But examination disclosed that her planking was sprung. Blind Man's Teeth had gnawed wide holes in her bow, had broken three ribs and bent the shaft. Her upper workings hung badly smashed.

"There she be," Captain Parish said sourly when his men completed their job, "that's all my crew is supposed to do, according to law . . . all and a lot more . . . just drag her up on land."

"Thanks," Delong answered, "let her lie where she is now. I'll find a carpenter in Madrid Bay. He can make her fit to float, then tow her to the harbor."

Delong had sat idly the first day after his wreck, unable to stand because of his sprained ankle. Captain Stocking remained stiffly polite to his guest; Sue made up for it with a pronounced cordiality. It was only after she demanded it on the second day that the keeper cut two straight cedar staffs, stripped them of bark, rubbed them down with beach sand, and presented them ungraciously to Delong for crutches. Delong managed to use them a part of that afternoon. The third day, as a result, he could not walk at all. While Sue Stocking read aloud, he sat impatiently in the lighthouse parlor.

He had asked Captain Parish to telephone his brother Fritz from the life-saving station. The coast guardsman did it grudgingly. He blamed Delong for many of the week's unreasonable happenings.

"How's it look on my reports?" he demanded of Captain Stocking. "How's it look, lighthouse getting out first to a wreck in the coast guard's territory? He had no business piling up out there!"

Captain Stocking agreed with that. The whole neighborhood of Blind Man's Eye would have been spared much unpleasantness if this Jim Delong had stayed anchored in Grand Haven in the first place. He supported Captain Parish fully when the latter refused to use the coast guard boat for taking the lawyer to Madrid Bay.

"Daren't leave post in thick weather," the keeper explained. "Nobody dares, Parish or anybody else. Except Sutton. He ain't liable to the gover'ment. Whyn't you ask Sutton to take you?"

"I will to-morrow." It was Tuesday night. "I'll get away to-morrow if I have to walk."

"Tut!" Captain Stocking answered. "So you don't like it here? Well, it's no place for white pants, that's a fact. Folks around here got to work."

"I often work," Delong answered quietly.

The assistant keeper, going about his own tasks silently, had few glimpses of Sue and then only while she entertained the stranger. Of Norman, Sue evidently saw nothing. She kept her first stern, critical silence, addressed her father's helper only when such practical needs as coal or kerosene or a call to supper demanded it. Wednesday morning the fog broke completely with a downpour that washed away the last mist. The sun looked brightly on an astonished coast, and that morning the red-haired Delong left Blind Man's Point in Sutton's boat.

Sue withdrew to her room immediately. Norman detected the odor of turpentine when he came into the house at noon, and realized that she was repainting her walls. He smiled, and shut the smell from his own quarters. She had taken her time obeying Cat-eye McGoogan!

It was the next evening that she surprised him by a new cordiality. He had been waiting in the tower for official sundown, leaning over the iron rail on the lakeward side of the lantern. A fresh wind had come out of the west, clean as the lighthouse itself. It was a relief to feel its dry cheery bluster. Norman took off his cap and let cool air blow against the bald spots on his head where the hair had burned. His scalp still was tender. He thought as he stood there that he missed the landsman Delong. Where other folks scowled, at least Delong gave him a decent good morning. Landsman? Well, city man, lawyer, whatever he was . . . owning a yacht didn't make him a sailor.

"A yachter is a landlubber in white pants," Captain Stocking had growled that morning.

Norman was surprised when Sue Stocking walked out on the castiron deck beside him. Her face had colored from climbing the stairs, a distinct amiability had come back to her voice.

"Hello," she said briskly.

"Hello!" Norman answered.

Her nonchalance angered him, after all this time. He returned his attention to the lake. A low black freighter smoked greasily along the sky-line. He watched it pass under the dropping sun.

"Norman Erickson," Sue began.

"Well?"

"I've come up here to ask you something. And I expect a decent answer."

"A decent look's more than I've got for a week."

"More than you deserve, Erickson. Do you expect me to fall on your neck? It'll be a long time before I forget the fade-out you did when the boat put off!"

"Why talk?" He faced her furiously, his blue eyes hard as pebbles. "I'm not putting myself up for a hero. I tried to go. I missed the boat. I may be ashamed, God knows I am, but it's no business of yours or anybody else."

"You're a fussy boy, Erickson. I ruined my young ankles climbing ninety-one steps to talk to you. Heaven knows I've stood enough. . . ."

"You have? What about me? What have I stood?"

Norman saw that Sue's face flushed, and not from the climb. When she spoke again, her voice was calmer.

"Erickson, where did you find Mr. Delong's packet?"

"Up the beach."

"Was it buried?"

"What makes you ask that?"

"You told Mr. Delong that some one else found it, and he told me. He told me more than that. He said that he knew who did it. Did you tell him?"

"No."

"Who did bury it?"

"You try to find out, Miss Sue. Ask your father, or Sutton, or Parish, or Baker . . . maybe some of them know!"

"I did ask Baker."

"And what did he say?"

"He saw you hide it. Then you became scared . . . nothing unusual in that . . . and you dug it up again."

Norman looked unsurprised. "That's a real neat explanation. What does Delong think of that?"

"Think? He thinks you're a little tin skipper on wheels."

"I'm glad some one does."

"But he's a lawyer. Lawyers always have funny ways of working things out. They beat around the compass and don't get anywhere. What he thinks makes no difference. I want to know whether you or Ed Baker told the truth?"

"Oh, Baker, of course," Norman said.

Sue Stocking bit her lip.

"You had better get another berth, Erickson. You don't belong on a light. . . ."

"So your father says. Cat-eye McGoogan says women don't!"

"You couldn't be expected to fit here. There's a way of getting out."

"Jump ship, eh? Jump the light? Delong's crew jumped ship. Wasn't much of a crew, either, but look what happened to him."

"There'll be nothing happen to the light!"

Norman rapped the iron rail with his knuckles.

"No, Miss Sue, I've changed my mind about quitting."

"It'll take more than changing your mind to keep you here! My father will make his report."

The assistant keeper shrugged. His tongue never could argue so readily as hers; its best was none too good. But some day he'd tell her. He would tell her she was a meddling young woman, a chunk of January ice, a girl no Erickson would take a second look at. And some day before he left Blind Man's Eye, he would bring Julie Richaud, and ask Sue Stocking to look at a nice, agreeable, red-checked farm girl out of the Canadas. Cat-eye McGoogan had been right when he said it was poor lighthouse business to clutter up the reservation with a woman. Half the difficulty since he came here began with Sue Stocking. There were Sutton and Baker, tricky with each other, lying, all because of her.

He planted his boots solidly. He was conscious that she was staring at him. He could stay on deck as long as she could. And keep just as silent. Out on the lake the black barge spit up smoke, soiling the orange sky.

"Norman!" Sue spoke impulsively.

"Well?"

"Just one more question."

"I've answered enough for one day."

"Mr. Delong's bundle of deeds, or whatever they were . . ."

"Oh, I'm sick of it!"

"Was it Ed Baker who buried it?"

"I'm not telling," Norman said firmly.

"So it *was* Ed Baker! Well, that settles him!"

She brushed past him abruptly and let herself down the ladder to the lamp room. The sun touched the edge of the water. Norman looked at his watch, and, waiting until the exact second, ignited the light, closed the gate at the back of the lens, saw its glow pick up sturdily against the sunset, and followed slowly down the ladder.

There was a dim light in the lamp room, seeping through the west window. Shadows bunched in the corners. A reflection of afterglow streaked in gleaming highlights the sides of the hanging brass lantern. Norman stopped to light it. Might as well do it now as later . . .

Something stirred at the top of the steps. He moved over cautiously. Standing in the corner, her head bent upon her arm, her arm against the wall, was Sue Stocking . . . weeping!

"What's the matter?" he asked. She did not speak. He touched her arm. "What's wrong?"

She lifted her face slowly. Her slim shoulder trembled under her thin white dress. He could not see her eyes.

"Go on down," she ordered, "I'll come along in a minute."

"I'll wait. What's wrong?"

"Oh, I am!" she sobbed. "I'm such a fool!"

"No, you're not."

"I am. There's Mr. Delong . . . he understands people, Norman. He told me you were all right, said you had a queer inheritance, but you'd come out all right."

"He doesn't know anything about it."

"He knows all about Baker. I must have been blind, or terribly stupid, Norman. I'm sorry for all I said. I trusted Baker. I've known him a long time, I believed him. Now I see . . . ."

"I don't get you."

"And that fishy Sutton! Dad insisted all along it was Sutton who hit Baker the first night. You got the blame for it. And now this other business, this bundle of papers. It wasn't you found them and opened them. You didn't have to dig them up and bring them in . . . this man was nothing to you. You did it because you're honest . . . oh, *why* did you bawl at that dog?"

She collapsed on the shadowy step. Norman leaned down and touched her hair gently. The lamp hummed above. Below on the rocks the warm waters of a calm evening lapped with friendly music. The girl sobbed. He could not see her face. She lifted it suddenly and looked at him. Norman stooped down, put his arm around her tight, and let go quickly.

He had kissed Sue Stocking, when all the time she cried he was thinking of Julie Richaud.

"Norman, Norman," she whispered tearfully, and fled down the stair.

He leaned dizzily on the edge of the work table after he heard her slam the tower door, and waited for the

strength to come back to his knees. Why had he kissed Sue Stocking . . . Sue Stocking of all the girls on earth? He certainly had not meant to. He did nothing he meant to.

His fingers shook as he lighted the small hanging lantern. In the kitchen at supper he emptied his plate without knowing what was on it. Sue's eyes were unusually bright.

They still sat at the table when Ed Baker went by on beach patrol. He hallooed and paused at the door. Sue arose and walked stiffly outside with him. She ran in, directly, with her cheeks cool and colorless. On her lips she wore the straight hard twist she reserved for anger.

"Baker didn't stay to eat with us?" Captain Stocking demanded.

"I didn't ask him."

"Eh?"

"I didn't ask him," Sue repeated, moving the lamp so that its glow did not fall on her face. "More pie, Norman? Oh, yes, pass your plate."

The assistant keeper scrubbed white paint in exalted spirits next morning. He had expected Sue to avoid him after the scene in the tower. But she did not. Instead she talked vivaciously during breakfast, almost foolishly. It would have been easier for Norman if she had snubbed him a little. He was accustomed to that. And after all, why had he kissed her? Because she cried? Because he was a sentimental fool? Because he cared for her, or just why?

It was exactly eighty-thirty and he was cleaning the brass in the lamp room when a boat put in to shore. He heard Sue welcome some one so warmly that her voice lifted half-way up to the tower. Norman looked down from the window. It was James Delong, returning with mechanics to examine his yacht. There were two men

with him. Norman's heart swelled with expectancy. It was Jim Nelson and . . . no . . . no, it was not Gustaf . . . his heart contracted. The other man was one of the Parson boys, the best hand at repairing boats in Madrid. Norman left the brass and went down.

"Jim," he cried, "I'm glad to see you!"

"Aye, I'm glad to see you, Norman." Nelson climbed out of the boat awkwardly, abashed by the presence of Sue Stocking. "That's the reason I come along, to see you. He needed a helper"—Nelson jerked his thumb toward Parson—"guess I ought to know a little about fixin' boats. Your paw's all right, Norman."

"All right?"

"Sure. Eatin' like a sand sucker. We lifted nets yesterday. Had eight hundred pounds."

"Prices good?"

"Sure. But say, Norman, Gustaf won't have none o' your money. He put what you sent in the stove, right along o' the letters. . . ."

"He did?" Norman spoke lamely. Sue and Delong were staring at him. He drew Jim aside. "Can I come back?" he asked.

"To stay?"

"No, no, to see him."

Nelson hesitated. "I dunno, Norman," he said, "I dunno what to say. He'd bust up the ship if he saw you. Sure, he'd *like* you to come. Only . . . you know . . . he's a hard skipper . . . he'd never tell you he'd like. He'd try to throw you overboard again . . . it might stir him up bad. . . ."

"All right," Norman said dully.

He took off his coat and prepared to help on the boat.

It should have temporary repairs, Delong directed, just enough to keep it afloat while being towed back

to Madrid breakwater. The lawyer left the three men as soon as the details were arranged, and hobbled through the loose sand, to sit down with Sue in the shade of the fog signal house. The day had turned unpleasantly warm for north Michigan, even in August. Norman found it hard to control his eyes while he sweated beside Nelson over the keel of the salvaged boat. He possessed only two thoughts. One concerned his father, the other dealt with his impression that Sue was enjoying herself immensely.

Ed Baker stalked by at nine o'clock. When he saw the two men from Madrid, he tramped down to the boat.

"Hello, Jim," he said to Nelson. "Hello, Parson." He turned to Norman. "White pants get a woman," he said unpleasantly, "don't matter what kind of gaffs they cover."

Norman drove in a nail.

"You better go talk somewhere else, Baker," he said.

The surfman laughed.

"Needn't be pikey. We're both in this, me and you."

"How so?" Norman sprang up to his feet and emptied his left hand of nails. Baker's grin annoyed him with its easy nod toward Sue. "Both in what?" he demanded.

"In what?" Baker taunted. "You don't know? Don't know she's pitched us both overboard? She's no fool, she knows money when she sees it."

Norman shifted his feet forward.

"You'd better cast off, Baker."

"Leastways she's a smart little cat-fish!"

Norman's cold face twitched.

"Get away, move along quick!" he ordered. "You don't need to be hanging around this lighthouse any more!"

"I don't?" Baker's jaw dropped. He had not expected this challenge. He met it, fists drawn, ready to fight.

"I say move along!" Norman cried.

Baker unclenched his hands.

"Don't get squally, Erickson! I say we're both in it."

"Float away!" Norman shouted.

The surfman retreated. Norman turned, hearing Nelson chuckle.

"You're learning," the old man said. "I guess that would have suited Gustaf."

Norman picked up his hammer. It displeased him to think Madrid Bay would hear of another quarrel; it would hear of Sue Stocking, hear untrue hints, and eventually they would reach Julie Richaud.

"Come here, Norman!" Sue cried.

He walked to her, his skin hot.

"There were plenty of witnesses to that argument," Delong said lightly.

Sue drew a quivering breath.

"Why didn't you hit him?" she demanded. "I'd have hit him. I heard what he said. There's not a strake of truth in his whole body! Not one! He wasn't so brave then as he talks, anybody can be brave . . ."

"I'm not," Delong interrupted.

Norman winced.

"Anybody can be that wants," Sue insisted.

"You're a ferocious young lady," Delong said.

He seemed younger to-day, not ten years older than Norman himself. His face had sunburned in the few days since he came ashore; its color made him look more like a native of the coasts.

"Sue's going to visit my farm to-morrow, Erickson," he said. "Coming up to see the lake and that dam which worries you. It hasn't broken yet." He

laughed. "The rains have put Tamarack River ten feet over its banks. But the dike is as firm as a rock, not a soft spot in it. I tested it myself this morning."

Norman shook his head.

"It'll break some day, just like a fish net. Not now, maybe. Some day when you're least expecting it."

"You people have great ideas!" Delong climbed to his feet. "You want all water just as the Lord made it. This girl here thinks a farm can be nothing but a jumble of potatoes and pasture . . . except in books. I'll be here nine o'clock, rain or shine!"

"To-morrow is Norman's day off duty," Sue suggested impulsively. "He might go along. Like to chaperon us?"

"Sorry," Norman refused. He thought swiftly of Julie. It would be a week to-morrow since he left her so rudely. "I've another plan," he said.

"Some other time," Delong agreed readily.

The wind shifted to the east by northeast shortly after the Madrid fish boat departed at eleven o'clock with the disabled yacht in tow. Norman, when he climbed to the tower, found Captain Stocking out on the deck looking into the heavens for trouble.

"Rain," the keeper predicted, "I feel it in my bones. We've had enough. There's been almost a week of it!"

Norman recalled what James Delong had said about the Tamarack River . . . ten feet over its banks. He thought of Julie Richaud.

"I'm taking my day off to-morrow," he told Captain Stocking.

"My, oh, my," the keeper grunted. "Whole family takin' offs?" He looked at Norman suspiciously. "You going along up there with Sue?"

Norman shook his head. The keeper continued.

"Ever see that picture-book farm? Ye have?

Well . . ." he hitched up his suspenders. "Well, you know, Erickson, my gal says that this lawyer ain't got a pig or a chicken on it. Not a single pig. Nothin' but cherries and cherry pits and a million mad bees. Think you'd like a farm, Erickson?"

"None I ever saw."

"You wouldn't? That's too bad. I been thinkin' . . ."

"No need thinking I'm going to quit here," Norman answered, "because I'm not. I told you, Keeper."

Captain Stocking raised a reproachful hand.

"I know, I know! Don't go puttin' full sail on that temper! But if you should decide . . ."

"I'm not getting out!" Norman said stubbornly.

CHAPTER XIV

MORE RAIN

It misted at noon. Norman blackened his extra boots, thinking with a rapid heart of the possible pleasures of the next day. There would be a crowd Saturday afternoon in Hans Miller's store in Madrid Bay. He would like to drop in, he wanted to do so more than ever since he had talked with Jim Nelson. But he would not. Not yet. He'd send by Sue for tobacco. He'd stay away from Madrid until he could take back a decent self-respecting pride, something old Gustaf would welcome. He pictured the noisy talk after the Delong wreck. Not very pleasant for Gustaf Erickson to hear his son laughed at in Pug Downey's pool-room. For of course Baker had rushed in with the story . . . his story . . . and of course they had laughed. Jim had not mentioned it. He was fundamentally kind.

No, he'd not go back, not until later. He'd mind Jim's advice.

He pressed his uniform in the lighthouse kitchen. By mid-afternoon new rain clouds pommeled out of the north and spread like ink across the water. Promptly at sundown, a quick light shower spattered the glass of the lantern. There was no wind, beyond a catsquall or two. The downpour began at six-thirty.

Norman ran out to the fog signal house after he finished his supper and made sure that the fires were ready to touch off. A sky full of rain! Germaine Richaud ought to be satisfied now. Certainly dry

weather would not blight his potatoes this season. Probably rains were washing them out.

The air took on a hard glassy stillness. Battle Ax light, fourteen miles north by northeast, turned misty. But there was no fog. Far to the northeast the lights of Madrid Bay shone steadily, a faint yellow illumination. Rain met the water with a low unbroken hiss, like the buzz of a boiling tea-kettle. The lamp in Blind Man's Eye answered it persistently with its sibilant hum. Norman, looking up at it, drew a breath of satisfaction.

Sue Stocking spoke at his elbow. Her yellow slicker hung loosely about her shoulders, but she wore no hat. Drops of rain glistened in her hair.

"If this isn't luck," she said. "Think it will last through to-morrow? I *do* want to go!"

"Why?" asked Norman. "Want to see Delong?"

"Delong?" she laughed. "Sure I want to see him, he's a change for my tired eyes. Think I never get enough of lightkeepers?" She was serious for a moment. "But I'll tell you the real reason."

"What?"

"I want to see a farm."

"A what?" Norman spoke incredulously.

"A farm. I've never seen one, except from the road."

"Never saw a farm?"

"Never been on one."

Norman laughed. It was inconceivable . . . he recalled weeds, the perversity of potato bugs. "Where'd you grow up?" he asked.

"Schooners. Lighthouses. When we lived up north of False Presque Isle . . . dad was on Spectacle Reef then, and I went to high school in Cheboygan . . . I rode home Saturdays on a slow train that passed little farms. All the women were fat and laughed every time they opened their mouths."

"This man doesn't have a *farm!*" Norman said abruptly.

"It's a fruit farm."

"No! It's a nice pretty summer resort. He wears white pants to work in!"

"What's that got to do with it? No law against being picturesque. Sailors wear white pants."

"Great Lakes sailors? Say, I'd like to have seen my father in a pair of white pants!"

"The navy does!"

"What's the navy know about water, any more'n it does about the coast guard business?"

"Well, what do *you* know about the water or the coast guard business?"

He flushed under her good-natured taunt.

"About as much as you do about farms."

She knew a great deal, she assured him.

"I've read about them. The book I just finished, the one Captain Parish brought me from Copperhead, is all about a country place. That's a farm. It's on Long Island."

"Where's that?"

"Down east near New York. Dad's seen it. He says the book is wrong. Long Island's just a big hump of sand and grass with Brooklyn on one end and Block Island light off the other, he says. He doesn't think much of Long Island."

"If it's got any farms," Norman said certainly, "they're not like what you see here. There's no farm near Madrid worth putting in a book."

"I'll wager the Delong place is!" She changed the subject. "Let's play cribbage."

He could not make out this new Susan. At least she did nothing by half measures. She dragged him into the house, singing as she ran, and for an hour and a half across the parlor table she laughed hysterically

over his unlucky plays. Captain Stocking, who had the early watch, looked in once and bespoke more quiet.

"You'll sink the lamp with your noise, Susan!" he said sternly. "And cards! Your mother never touched such wickedness!"

"My father did!" She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him. Captain Stocking beamed.

"Go get yourself a gal, young fellow," he said significantly to Norman, "have some women-folks, and what you care how the wind blows? I know! I've beat home, seas bustin' like judgment, wind howlin' so I'd of been scart right out o' my shirt, hadn't been for thinkin' of getting home to Sue and Sue's maw." He smacked his daughter's cheeks.

Norman kept his eyes on the cribbage board. There had been no allusion to his own kiss of Susan. She was blushing, a healthy pink that spread from her cheeks to her neck.

"I'm no good at sailing, Sue," he confessed humbly when the keeper had gone, "but I'm going to stay on here if I sink the light doing it!"

She shook her head. "I don't know," she said doubtfully. She quoted her father, without giving him the credit for it. "Once you get scart of water you always carry it, like a black cat on the shoulder."

It still rained when Norman took his watch at midnight. Against the tower windows large drops of water drummed a quick, dexterous tattoo. It still sleeted down out of a slaty sky at breakfast. But at eight o'clock a keen wind slipped around from the west and thirty minutes later the sun shone. The air, clearing, promised a fair day.

Norman did not wait for Delong's car to plow down to the end of the good road. He sighted it before Sue did, but as he made out the big figure of Delong in the front seat, he broke through the wet sand crust on top

of the dunes, avoided the car and the driver and started inland. Sue had asked him twice since breakfast why he hurried so. He was thinking of Julie Richaud and decided that he need not answer.

He did not know how Julie would greet him. He remembered with shame the way he had left her. Why did he always quarrel with the folks he liked best?

The road was muddy; in places deep pools covered its full width. He sat down to rest after three miles. That obstinate and unbending force which bound him to deep waters overcame his spirit now that he turned his back upon the lake. He got up savagely and walked toward the Richaud farm. An unclean speck had enlarged into a cloud on the northeast sky. More rain!

He splashed into a puddle to give way for a hooting automobile. The car squawked its brakes.

"Better ride," called James Delong.

Norman swung around. Sue Stocking beamed like the sun itself in her shining yellow slicker. What Madrid Bay fisherman dared wear one so yellow? Norman saw her admiringly. She *was* pretty with those bright drops of red in her cheeks. And she never seemed aloof with this stranger.

"Turning off here," Norman answered.

"You've been sitting in the mud," Sue cried. "Look at him, Mr. Delong. He spent an hour yesterday pressing that uniform. It proves what I've been saying. . . ."

"This girl tells me that you're a poet, or an artist or something and don't know it," the lawyer said.

"A dreamer," Sue corrected.

Norman denied it. "No," he replied cheerfully, "that's another thing I'm not aiming to be."

They spattered away, rounding a curve in the road. Norman lagged after them. The valley was very green along the lane to the Richaud house. In the Tamarack

River bottom a broad yellowish water with creeping edges covered the sheep pasture. Norman observed it uneasily. Rough black and brown chunks of wood, stumps for the most part, washed down with the stream from the hills. How old Germaine must be squalling. The sheep pasture flooded! That was good for at least a month's talk!

The gate was open. Some one had been careless. Norman delayed while fastening it, to look back toward Lake Michigan. A fog bank like a gray friar's cowl was slipping down upon the pine-topped headlands. The black northeast cloud reached upward toward the sun. More rain.

Norman rapped at the kitchen door. Madame Richaud opened it. Her warm friendly face was disturbed with anxiety. The baby in her arms was crying.

"You!" she exclaimed. "*Sacré nom!* What takes you here to-day?"

"Hello, madame," Norman answered. "Where's Julie?"

"With her father. The little sheep are drowning!" Madame Richaud pointed excitedly. "Down there . . . the lower pasture!"

"I'll find them," Norman answered, "it looks like more rain."

"Always!" she cried. "It stops never!"

He proceeded through the barnyard. Here, too, the bars of the gate were down. Confounded careless the Richauds were getting! Small roosters lifted their legs with ridiculous precision in the muddy path. Norman stepped around them. He observed that the loose boards of the walk from the house to the barn gate were covered with water. He could hear the river, as he crossed the high end of the pasture, rushing among the scrub willows, tumbling over rocks, making the most of its momentary greatness.

His feet grew wet in the springy sod. He passed around a clump of cedars and in the field beyond made out Julie and her father. They were peering up the valley. Norman ran.

"Ahoy, there, Julie!" he cried.

The girl turned. Norman felt a tempestuous rush of pleasure as he saw her handsome round head with its purple-black hair atop it. What would she say? Would she ask him again to farm? Would she still see no virtue in his duty at the light, call it a "wet business," have nothing to do with it? She had heard of the wreck, no doubt. Who hadn't? She might chide him for not making the boat with Parish, upbraid him, be ashamed of the way he went to pieces over that wretched dog . . . "a big dog, hairy all over" . . . well, he'd never collapse over a dead dog again. Delong had cured him of that!

Julie's greeting had nothing to do with any of this; for all her manner, she might have forgotten the whole episode of his other visit.

"Oh, Norman!" she cried. "Ruined! Everything is ruined!" Tears stained her cheeks. "That water . . . that wicked, wicked water, it has drowned the smallest sheep. A dozen of them! They were fond of me, Norman! My father says the dam up above will break this time. If it does, pff, what becomes of us?"

Norman looked in the direction she pointed. The valley narrowed and grew craggy above the farm, with overhanging rocks and bare walls of stone. Far beyond, a mile or more above, the red painted buildings of the Delong farm sat securely on a high hillside. Just fifty yards away, on land that yesterday had been pasture, the swollen river ran noisily. Sheep browsed unconcernedly at the edge of the water, a score of them, all that remained of the Richaud flock.

"Is it so bad?" Norman asked.

"Bad?" Germaine cried. "All water is bad!" He bore a long ugly scratch across his face, as if he had been struggling to no avail with unfriendly circumstance. His clothes were wet; there was a long tear in the right leg of his denim overalls. He shook his fist toward the south. "That Fritz Delong is what you call a calf!" he shouted. "If the dam breaks . . ."

"It won't break," Norman answered calmly.

"Who says so?"

"His brother."

"Him? A Delong? What does he know?"

Norman faltered. After all, what *did* James Delong know; a great deal about books and courts of law and liars and honest men and other good and bad traits in human nature, but what about the perversity of the Tamarack River, far, far above, in those higher hills, before it fed down into his lake?

"He knows a good many things," he said hesitantly. "He's been staying at the lighthouse. He was wrecked . . ."

"And you saved him?"

"The captain did."

"You should let him drown!" Germaine squalled. "Why did they build a dam? Why did they come here, resortin'? They do not work with their hands, they wear lazy white pants, both them Delongs. . . ."

Julie touched his sleeve.

"The rest of the sheep, father," she reminded him. "We came to drive them up to the barn."

"You go to the house," Germaine answered, "me, I take care of the sheep."

Norman lifted Julie over the last fence. She scrambled across a soggy patch of ground, and on higher land paused, spread out her hand, palm up, and looked at it. Norman had a swift desire to seize it, to press it in both his own. She peered inquiringly at its lines.

"I see more wicked rain," she read uneasily. "Why

do you laugh, Norman Erickson? You do not believe it? It is true. Come inside."

A surly wind whipped by their heads, waves of mist trailed it. Norman stepped behind Julie into the Richaud kitchen, oblivious to the coming storm, to children, to everything and every one except Julie. He felt words swell through him.

"Julie, I've been remembering what we said when I was here last time . . ."

"So have I, Norman."

"You have?" He caught both her hands.

"Julie, Julie!" called her mother.

Madame Richaud had rushed to the window. Julie followed quickly. Norman stared after her, his eyes wide . . . by Mackinac, she was pretty to-day! Her sun-red cheeks, dark eyes, her teeth, two black curls down the back of her neck, her blown hair in a high, dark mass . . . why, Sue Stocking didn't show up at all in comparison.

Outside the house they heard the voice of Germaine. He was panting toward the door, waving his hands.

"It comes!" he screamed, "Julie! Quick, run, the cows, the team, the sheep! Quick! Help me, it comes!"

Norman raced after the girl.

Germaine pointed south toward the hills. The river slashed past over its low banks, an excited yellow current. Far up the valley rumbled the positive voice of moving waters. In a black convulsive torrent the flood swept down. The Delong dam had broken.

"Julie!" Norman cried. A sudden burst of rain blanked his sight. "Julie!"

The bellowing river answered. It struck the top of the farm and ripped down the last steep descent. Waters roared like a bursting planet . . . half a mile away . . . a quarter mile . . . an eighth. In a minute they would arrive . . . half a minute. . . .

"Julie!" Norman shouted, "Julie!"

CHAPTER XV

PICTURE BOOK FARM

James Delong's car splashed heavily through the mud. Speed became more and more difficult as it progressed farther inland. Sue Stocking, sitting beside the lawyer on the front seat, remembered Norman Erickson with an uncomfortable regret. She should have insisted that he get in. He had a lonely, almost unhappy air when they passed him tramping up to his shoe-tops in ruts. He was a solemn fellow. Sue was of the opinion that it did no good for anybody, man or boy, to spend too much time thinking. Delong broke the silence.

"He's a queer lad."

"Norman?" Sue stirred restlessly. "Just that," she answered. "I can't make him out. Times I understand him straight as a string. Then he goes off on another tack and I lose all my bearings. He's honest. But he's afraid of water."

"Oh, no!"

"Not afraid of water?" Sue looked at Delong in astonishment. "Certainly he is! Even dad admits it. He says fears like that are born in a man and won't wear out. I'd wear 'em out!"

"No," Delong answered, his eyes on the road, "I think you're wrong. Erickson had a number of bad frights when he was a young child. His father"—Delong laughed, a little ruefully—"what a terrible old Viking his father must be! . . . he's accused him of

being a coward so many times that Norman almost believes it. Of course this is merely guesswork. But you take for instance that affair down on the beach the night he arrived. We call it assault and battery in court when a man knocks another on the head. It requires a certain type of man, with definite characteristics, to commit that kind of crime. I've learned to know those fellows. Erickson isn't that type."

"He didn't hit anybody in the back," Sue admitted, "but he is afraid as death of water."

"No." Delong spoke a little impatiently. "You're very obstinate about that, Miss Stocking. Erickson was only unnerved the other night. I don't think he'll ever be that way again. My dog did it."

"A dog! And what's a dog, to make a grown man shake like a spilling sail? I saw your dog on the beach. He didn't frighten me."

"No, he wouldn't. He was a good lazy pup. Erickson was the first person he ever frightened. But Erickson had a fright once about a dog. He told me."

Sue Stocking sniffed.

"That doesn't sound like sense alongside deep water."

She became silent. Her heart thumped unexplainably. Norman didn't deserve a defense like this. He *had* run from the dog. But she pictured that scene in the tower two nights before, the assistant keeper's shy attempts to comfort her, the reflection of the sunset through the window of the lamp room, the burn of his kiss on her cheek. She was tempted to tell Delong of that incident.

"His old Danish father used to frighten him out of his wits when he was a boy," the lawyer continued just as she was about to speak, "that's why the dog unnerved him. I know how ashamed he is of it now. I've been there!"

Sue shook her head unbelievingly.

Delong threw the engine into low gear and it grunted up a slippery incline. Water streaked in a dozen arteries through the middle of the road. The ditches were brooks. Two miles above the crossroads he made an agile turn to the right into a private lane that was solid with fresh gravel.

"It's a bad climb from here on, but the road's good," he explained. "The water is unusually high in the Tamarack River, way over the banks, measures sixteen feet deep in some places."

He slowed the car that Sue might view the Delong property from a ridge. It lay with a beauty that was almost shipshape. Sue gave a cry of delight. She never had seen fields so clean and well cared for. The country looked almost as if it had been scrubbed, as exact in its plan as Blind Man's Eye itself, with straight orderly rows of fruit trees, most of them bent with the weight of ripe cherries; prim green squares of truck gardens; and an immense round blue lake that reflected in gray shadows the low rainy clouds.

"There it is," Delong said with pride, "there's our farm. You can see every inch of it from here. The houses are on the shore there in the woods. You can just make out the barn through the trees . . . that red spot is the cattle barn."

He speeded up the engine.

"I'm coming here to live all the year round some day. I love this country. It's both land and water and has all the joys of each. This was Indian reservation originally. I'll show you the names of the first owners . . . you may have a better tongue for Ottowa than I. They had a habit of deeding their property to the President of the United States every so often. Generous of them, but it played the very devil with titles. I've been more than a year getting the

papers straightened out . . . that's why I became so upset the other night when I thought that I had lost them . . .'' He stopped before he had finished his sentence. ''More rain!'' He wiped the windshield. ''We're having too much.''

Sue came back to earth. She had heard only half that he said about the ownership of the land. Her thoughts had been drifting . . . this *was* a country place just like the ones she had read about . . . a private drive, cattle barn hidden in trees, an artificial lake, tenants' houses . . . it might be Long Island. Norman was wrong about there being no such farm in the neighborhood of Madrid. Delong, stopping the car, inhaled smoke lazily and threw the stub of his cigarette sizzling into a roadside pool.

''Here we are,'' he cried cordially, ''and over there you see my brother Fritz . . .'' he stopped, frowning. ''I wonder what's up?'' He pointed toward the lake.

Rain was falling briskly again. Circling a thin second-growth woods that acted as a screen between stables and dwelling house, Delong had halted under a grove of tall elms on the shore of the artificial lake. Men had been seeding the lawn that day. The slope was cluttered with wheelbarrows and drags. A hoe lay directly in the road. Delong kicked it aside with his good ankle and helped Sue down from the car.

''Jump,'' he said, ''everything's wet.''

He turned away as soon as she stood on the ground.

''If you'll wait just a second . . . '' he hobbled toward the lake. ''I'll be right back. I want to see what's up over there.''

He left Sue by the car. She hesitated a minute, uncertain what he meant her to do, and then started after him. Even the gravel path was wet. It led indirectly from an old white frame house with a long

screened porch and green shutters down across the new seeding and north around the end of the lake. Here a great barrier, ten yards wide, ten times that long, had been built of sand and clay and stones. The Tamarack River, which once had flowed as it pleased out of the hills, a slow idle stream that soaked good soil into swamp, was tumbling now ferociously over the spillways of an artificial fall. Sue had expected nothing so immense as this. The anxiety with which it plunged over the barrier reminded her of waves shattering on the Teeth. James Delong had said that since the fortnight's rains the river was sixteen feet deep in spots down below. She knew it was nothing like that ordinarily. She had heard Norman tell her father once . . . they were discussing the aversion of the French-Canadian farmers to water sports . . . that down at Madrid Bay, where the Tamarack swelled out to meet Lake Michigan, it was three times as big a stream as anywhere up above.

"It's not good for much since the Delongs put in their dam," he had said, "just a trickle in dry weather. There's no fish left in it. Rowboats?" He had laughed at the idea of a French-Canadian farmer getting into a rowboat from choice.

It was swollen to more than a trickle to-day. And what a volume of water must be accumulating up in the hills back of the dam! Sue shivered. She knew very little about rivers, except to feel that Lake Michigan was immeasurably safer. What had Norman meant yesterday when he said that the dam would burst sometime like a fish net?

A half-dozen men swarmed the narrow embankment. She recognized them as Frenchies by their short stout bodies and their dark skins. They were swinging spades, shouting, heaving sand and mud.

"What's wrong?" Delong cried.

He forgot Sue.

"Fritz!" he called again. "What's happened?"

A tall thin man in muddy flannels labored on his knees half-way across the dam. He was much older than his brother, ten years perhaps, with a narrow sharp face shining now with perspiration. From where she stood Sue heard him swearing in a mild voice, swearing slowly, with a great deal of dignity. He was crowding sand desperately into a hole in the dike. When he heard his brother call he shouted back, but did not stop work.

So that was Frederick Delong, whom people called Fritz. Sue had heard of him often. Fishermen, when they were in friendly mood, described him as the man who smiled when he cussed them out. He was not smiling now, only cussing; working doggedly with hands and feet, apparently against unequal odds.

The artificial lake spread three-quarters of a mile wide, twenty feet deep behind its dam, a blue, swollen circle in the contours of the hills. Rain was falling with a sullen hiss upon the surface of the water, that had already crawled to the very top of the embankment. The fresh wind slapped small waves against the crumbling banks. Earth, caving from its sides, fell into the water with a cloudy yellow splash; it disappeared and more slid after it.

Sue ran toward the embankment. She was a handsome figure in her yellow slicker. But no one noticed it. James Delong, after jerking off his coat, had grasped a shovel from the hands of a French-Canadian and was working beside his brother. The muscles swelled like rubber tubes in his neck, along the backs of his hands, under the sleeves of his white shirt as he pommeled sand into a widening crevice. Sue tripped over the mooring line of a rowboat made fast to a stake upon the bank. The stake came out, as if it had been driven into dough,

and water filled the hole immediately. She moved out recklessly upon the embankment.

"I can help!" she cried.

Delong jerked around.

"Get back on land!" he ordered sharply. His voice was hard. Sue, hearing it, felt her heart beat a little faster. It must be serious business if it made him speak to her like that. She dodged backward to avoid a running Frenchman. He blundered into her with his upraised shovel and the two of them sprawled on the narrow fill. Sue felt the mud slipping under her hands.

"James Delong!" she cried.

"Get up to the house!" he ordered. "Quick . . . it's going . . . run!"

He abandoned the gaping hole. He was limping badly as he rushed along the dam toward her. Fritz Delong, the useless shovel in his hands, his mouth wide open, already had started toward solid earth on the other side. The French-Canadians were scurrying for safety.

Sue retreated the half-dozen steps she had come. She plowed upward from the dike to the shore, her shoes heavy with mud. Wet earth sank like quicksand under her feet. She lost her balance, staggered up, clawing at gravel, and with a scream in her throat looked back at the mud and clay structure.

Behind her there sounded a prolonged sucking noise like the undertow in Blind Man's Teeth. She saw the dam sliding out into space. Water like yellow plowshares sliced through the soggy bank. A broad gash spread where a minute before men had been laboring.

She saw Fritz Delong plunge into the Tamarack River with the ripping wall, his eyes wide, his gray hair standing up like juniper brush atop his narrow head, his mouth wide open, swearing to himself and no words passing audibly. She saw his red-haired brother, his face turned toward her and a reassuring smile upon

it. Earth slid under his feet as he raced for safety. Water engulfed him. Only his shoulders lifted above it, but the smile still was stamped upon his lips. She saw a higher wave burst over his head; then only his left hand, small and terrifyingly insignificant, showed above the swirl of the freed waters.

She screamed again. The voice of the flood swallowed up her cry. A dreadful and extravagant bellow, like the birth of thunder, trumpeted across the hills. The plaything that the Delongs had built flung down the narrow valley, an undisciplined, lustful giant, mad with long confinement, rending, smashing, crushing the slow and solid structures of nature and the petty works of man.

The rowboat that had been moored to the bank floated bottom-up for a moment, then dived. It arose twisting, and slashed with the racing water. A French-Canadian, still foolishly gripping the handle of his shovel, bobbed out of a swirl and was thrown impetuously ashore.

"*Sacré nom!*" he cried.

He staggered up the bank, spitting mud. He straightway fell to weeping, in muck to his knees, still holding the shovel. Fritz Delong's thin white face bobbed to the top of the rising current. His mouth had frozen open, his hair stood up stiff and gray. An undercurrent sucked him down.

Sue Stocking squeezed shut her eyes.

"Get him!" she screamed. "Get him! You!" She wrenched at the Frenchman's arm. "That is Fritz Delong . . . get him!"

The little workman looked once at the racing water. Then he turned and fled. Sticks, cedar poles from the dam, branches of trees pitched with aimless and grave gestures over the spot where she had seen Fritz Delong; then, grown suddenly sprightly, they slid into swifter water and disappeared.

Of James Delong there was no sign, only his hand clutching upward in that first horrible explosion of water power.

Sue panted weakly toward the house. A woman had run out on the porch, a fat woman, evidently the cook. She peered down stupidly at disaster. Then its significance reached her and she threw her apron over her head in a foolish attempt to halt the inevitable with a yard of percale. Screaming, she too fled.

Sue darted blindly down a path to the left along the top of the river bank. It was ten feet here above the water. The flood careened past her, mocking her slow feet. Ahead, where the rocky defile opened into a wider valley, she caught sight briefly of its marching front ranks. A small barn, listing on one corner, it flung crazily before it. Slim uprooted trees, their branches twisting like water wheels, spun over and over tipsily. The sky was darkening rapidly. A black cloud rolled low across the western hilltops. Its edges were stained an unhealthy yellow.

At the next bend in the rocky path she sighted the capsized rowboat, still sweeping downward. Below, where the valley widened, a small low plastered house squatted on the earth like a frightened chicken. At one side a gray barn and half a dozen outbuildings stood in six feet of water.

Sue wiped the rain from her eyes. The cloud blackened. It was appalling, such darkness at midday. A burst of fresh wind enveloped her, whipping her wet torn yellow slicker about her knees. From the higher ground she looked again on destruction, again unable to help. Indistinctly, through the growing obscurity, she saw the flood rise higher against the barn, weave wet arms about it, saw the roof split open and dusky figures running. She halted, aghast. It was dark; an unnatural midday twilight blotted the scene before her.

CHAPTER XVI

THE TEMPER OF THE TAMARACK

Norman assumed command in the soggy Richaud barnyard. Indecision played no part this time. He felt rage chiefly, rage that a mere river should behave so indecently. A river! What right had the Tamarack to pour out of the hills like a cyclone?

With the first roar of released waters, far up the spongy valley, a bank of yellow cloud rolled down the western sky. It spread like an oily smoke across the heavens, cast its somber shadow upon the sweating earth. It seemed to reach down to the very treetops on the hills above. Norman, glancing aloft as he ran, recognized its sallow unwholesome complexion. Such clouds covered the lake before a gale! The same yellow lights stained the sky over Lake Michigan when wicked weather was in the making. And down from the hills rumbled a sound as ominous as any cry that ever burst across the lake, the voice of released inland waters, mad after their long captivity, howling with new freedom. The flood pushed white teeth before it. The cloud dropped lower. The air trembled. Julie ran past.

"Julie!" Norman cried. "Not that way! Here! Quick, up to the hills!"

She did not heed. Her remaining sheep were milling around the pasture in the bottoms at the very edge of the water. Above them the shoulders of the flood pressed forward. Julie plunged toward them. Madame Richaud was paddling her children up across the barn-

yard to higher ground. Germaine, at her heels, was cursing the Delongs, pleading with his patron saint, profane and pious in turns.

"Julie!" Norman shouted. "This way, Julie!"

He cried out again: "Julie!"

The nearing waters howled louder than he. His words were lost, even in his own mouth. She was thirty paces ahead. He charged after her. The sheep, recognizing her, trotted slowly in her direction.

"*Allez!*" she was screaming. "You foolish beasts, up! Up!"

The runaway water poised at the line fence above the farm and with a deft leap straddled the wires. It yanked over posts, ripped the patent gate from its rollers and poured with a new ferocity across Germaine's spotless potato fields.

Norman reached Julie's shoulder; he was shaking her, pulling, shouting into her ear.

"Come back! You are mad, Julie!"

"No, no!" She jerked away. "Would I leave the poor sheep?"

The dark cloud leaned down closer, flinging its shadow in a long black band across the farm. Norman, while he dragged Julie up the hill, saw Germaine, clawing along the bank below. The old man had returned to the barn. He had dragged the new mower half-way through the wide door. Trying to save the mower? Norman laughed aloud; there was no mirth in his laughter. Like Gustaf's, it was. He pushed Julie upward and ran toward the old man. Germaine abandoned the mower. He began crawling back up the hill with water snapping at his heels. Even above the howl of the flood, Norman heard his affrighted words.

"Name of the saint," he panted, "it is the end of the world the priest promises . . ."

His cattle shrank back from the water with surprise.

A heifer started in panic toward higher ground, and the rest followed. One old cow less agile than the others, sank her feet in mire, and the river poured over her head. The sheep, baa-ing timidly, trotted past Julie, along the moving bank. Norman ran back to her. She waded to her knees in water.

"Come!"

"My sheep!"

He stooped over, picked her up fiercely and carried her twenty paces. She was wet in his arms, surprisingly light, warm against his heart. She kicked her heels angrily.

"Put me down . . . down!" she demanded. "Look!"

Clinging helplessly to a short bouncing log, far out in the stream, a man whipped by them. Only his head poked above the water, a gray blot upon the angry black surface. The log on which he rode pitched under tipsily, up, under, up once more, and beyond into obscurity.

"A man!" Julie screamed. She started forward. "And there go my sheep . . . swimming. . . ."

Norman caught her by the sleeve. Its cloth ripped and his fingers sank into her arm. The sky became astoundingly dark. The curled edges of that monstrous cloud still reflected a saffron tint, but its center had assumed a violent blackness. It swept eastward, jeopardizing the earth with a sudden unwholesome twilight.

"Get back, Julie!" he commanded. "I see a boat coming . . . there . . . let go my arm . . . I can get it, I'll go after that man. . . ."

He pushed away her hands, sat down, and yanked off his shoes. She followed him three steps, four, five, then halted. Norman leaped into the river. The Richaud barn shivered under a broad sweep that moment, nails screeched, timbers smashed. Yellow un-

baled hay floated upon the yellow Tamarack under the yellow and black cloud. In thick heaps it soaked up water and floated aimlessly. Norman waded out from shore. He felt the jerk of the current, the suction of the undertow. The capsized boat spun nearer. He splashed toward it, staggered once beyond his depth, and kicked out.

His hands touched the gunwale of the boat. It seemed to stand still for a second; then it turned unexpectedly, made an angry gesture, jerked away from his cramped fingers and sped back to midstream with the shifting current.

Norman shook muddy water from his eyes. He could see the man no longer. Who was he? A Delong? It did not occur to him then. How could he know that he was the last to see Fritz Delong alive? Three days later, when the water dropped, searchers from Madrid Bay found the body of James Delong's brother by a willow sapling five miles below.

Again Norman shook water from his eyes. He could scarcely see. The inky cloud spread wider across the sky, and bending, seemed to glower down at the earth. Norman struggled toward shore. Where was Julie? All about him the drowned world lay in darkness. He called. The roar of unleashed waters blotted out all lesser sounds, swallowed up earth, river and sky in its bellow.

He called again. A white birch tree, spinning in the river, twisted its gray ghostly branches through the murky light. It rolled nearer. Hazily Norman made out figures on its trunk. Men. Two of them. Clinging with arms and legs to the smooth bark.

He splashed out of the water. He had missed that other man, he would not miss these . . . there must be some way of getting out to them. Twenty feet up the bank, the earth-covered potato cellar of the Richaud

farm bulked in the shadows. Norman charged up the slope, yanked at the cellar door. It was a broad, staunchly-battened piece of two-inch planking, laid without hinges. Back by the stream he splashed it down. He might catch up with those men. Might! He pried away from the bank, a stick in his hands for an oar.

He heard Julie shouting after him. Heard her but could not see. A nibbling current swept him out. A cow mooed near at hand. He saw it indistinctly, drinking without concern at the edge of the flood. His raft slid into deep water.

The tree was bowling another hundred yards downstream. Norman used the stick left and right, first as a sweep, then as a rudder. His raft threatened to upset. He dropped to his knees for a second and held firm, balancing. The door spun again. He was only twenty yards from the tree now. He saw more clearly.

The heavier of the two men was James Delong.

"Grab hold when I go under you!" Norman shouted. "Hang by your elbows overside. This plank won't hold us all sitting. I'll steer to shore."

The tree thundered along, dragging on bottom. The water was deep here, twenty feet at least. The root-house door swished into the first thick branches.

"Jump!" Norman cried. "Quick!"

James Delong slid precariously into the water. His arm reached out, with a sleeve torn away; he clutched almost feebly for the potato cellar door. Norman steadied the extra weight.

"You next!" he bade.

This was one of Fritz Delong's laborers, this second man, a French-Canadian, lean, dark, stunted, clad in baggy overalls. He crawled nervously down his branch and stuck one foot into the water. Immediately he drew it back.

"Jump!" Norman shouted.

The Frenchman thumped the boards awkwardly and slid off. Norman caught him. The man clawed.

"Hold still!" Norman warned. "You'll tip us!"

Delong was panting. He had not tried to speak. He drew his elbows up to the plank and stared back the way he had come. He was searching for some one.

"Sue?" Norman demanded.

"Safe, I think . . . I don't know about Fritz . . ."

Currents imperiled the raft. Left it flung, then right. Along the west horizon a thin cord of yellow light cast trees and hills into a tortured silhouette. Norman pushed on the stick. Sweat and muddy river water ran into his eyes. He breathed painfully.

"There!" Delong cried.

He released his grip, pointed precariously with one hand. Norman's eyes, picking through the unreal light, saw a shape floating a few yards away, an indefinite body, gray as Delong's face. It bobbed to the top, sank, bobbed up again. A man's head?

Norman on his knees, watched it sink, rise once more, swirl nearer, sink again. Loose hay from the Richaud barn swam in scattered patches above it. The object dislodged itself, floated closer.

"Grab him!" Norman shouted. The Frenchman cowered against the raft. "Quick! Delong!"

James Delong tried to reach out with one arm. The raft spun. Norman extended his stick. It came into contact with a body. He pulled. Currents sought to draw the cellar door. Norman dropped to his bruised knees.

"Steady this raft!" he commanded.

He leaned out, face down on the boards. His fingertips touched the body. He pulled. The door tipped. He bent his elbows sharply. His shoulders convulsed.

His knees drew under him and he cried out spasmodically. What *was* this he touched? He flinched; tried to free himself from it. What was it? His fingers felt the warm flesh of a body through a coat of wet shaggy hair. A big, wet, woolly body. It drew him after it into a deep sucking current. Again he cried out. The black cloud ripped apart in that instant and a melancholy daylight shone through. James Delong, clinging to the door, saw Norman's face contort with a sick distrust, the color drain out of it, the eyes open wide as if they were about to burst. They still were open, staring, as he slid, unheeding, from the door into the water. His mouth gaped. The stream closed over his head. His feet kicked once above the surface, then they too disappeared.

He was fighting wet mats of hair as the water poured over him. His numb hands were entangled in a woolly body, that would not let him go. His courage shattered at that first cold touch. Into his ears the river rumbled that horrible tale. He saw his father, heard his father's singsong voice:

"A good dog . . . hairy all over . . ."

His half-drowned mind flashed back to the shore at Blind Man's Eye. To another dog, dead in the wash. He was fighting as he went down . . . fighting water and wet fur, fighting to free his hands, fighting miserable memories. His elbows were stiff. He could not loosen his hands. A convulsion shook him. It pried open his fingers and he came up, choking, to see a vague outline of trees. He heard a voice.

Gustaf's voice? No, not Gustaf's. It was Delong. Delong, in water to his armpits, was dragging him on his feet over a bottom that shelved upward. He carried him now; he was talking.

"A dead dog!" Norman cried.

"No! Not a dog!"

Water spilled from Norman's mouth. He saw Delong's face. There was blood on it. It was twisted from pain. He still was shaking him. Still shouting. The words beat into Norman's ears.

"Brace up, it was *not* a dog!"

Brace up? Too late for that. He had acted the coward . . . he did not care. He had failed again when the test came.

"Damn that dog!" he cried. His own voice filled his ears. He tried to pull away. His fingers burned. He rubbed them in mud, to rid them of the feel of cold fur, on a warm wet body.

"It was a sheep!" Delong was saying, repeating it over and over. "That was a sheep! No dog. Sheep!"

"Sheep?"

Norman blinked muddy water out of his eyes. He could discern the river now, still chewing its new banks. Thirty feet away in a clump of cedars lodged the body of one of Julie Richaud's sheep.

Here came Julie running toward him. She was waving his shoes in the air. Her cheeks flamed; tears and rain had dried together on her face. One torn stocking rolled about her ankle. Norman spit out more water, coughed, sat up on the ground where James Delong had dropped him.

"You saved two men!" Julie Richaud cried.

"No, Julie. . . ."

"I saw you!" She bent down beside him, her bright lips to his cheek. "I saw you!" she cried again. "You saved two men!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE SPLENDOR OF RISK

"I DID not!" Norman argued.

He staggered up, pushing Julie's hands from him. Had she not seen? "Tell her, Delong," he commanded, "tell her the straight of it . . ."

"There's no need," Delong answered. His face twitched again. He was standing with his weight on one foot, protecting the other ankle. "I wouldn't have made shore without you, Erickson."

"Wouldn't have made it?" Norman laughed. Again his mirth resembled old Gustaf's. "I'm a yellow-bellied pickerel," he said bitterly.

"Oh, no! You got us nearly in. Even the Frenchie could wade." Delong turned. "Where is that fellow? I saw him run up the bank. . . ."

Julie looked at Norman anxiously. She did not understand this; a hard merciless wrath shone in his blue eyes. It was wrath against himself, apparently, for his own shortcomings. Now, how could that be? Had she not seen him plunge out after two men with a root-house door? As reckless as Gustaf? She pushed back the black wet hair that tumbled across her eyes. It did not matter what troubled Norman now. It was temporary, of no importance. Nothing could minimize for her the greatness of the foolhardy thing she had seen him attempt. She turned and regarded this other man. Norman seemed to be acquainted with him.

"This is James Delong, Julie," Norman said, "one of the brothers . . ."

Julie drew back. "A Delong?" she repeated. "One of those?" She pointed up the Tamarack. An uncharitable rage possessed her. She stamped her foot in the mud. "Your soul is lost, Delong!" she cried furiously. "The good God will never forget it. Drown people's sheep? Good little sheep that think the flood is a big drink of water! My father's hay, all the hay gone, the barn ruined. Why did you build that lake?" She beat her hands together. "Why don't you resorters stay in your own homes? Why do you come here? We do not want you!"

"Julie! Julie Richaud!" Norman cried rebukingly.

"I do not care! It isn't right. I didn't know this was a Delong. Twice you lighthouse people run out and save his life!"

Norman felt an unaccountable sensation of helplessness. He pitied Delong, yet he hated himself. A sheep! It was worse than the dog on the beach.

"Julie," he begged, "Julie!" He plucked at her arm. "This man did not know the dam would break! And look, he can hardly walk, his ankle's gone bad! He's hurt, Julie!"

"Hurt?"

Delong turned with a miserable expression. "I don't blame you, Miss Richaud."

"Hurt?" Julie repeated. "How do you get yourself hurt when Norman saves your life?" Her manner changed. "Come to the house then," she bade. She could be hostile to no one just now. Her anger was gone; being capable, she began at once to make plans. "Thank the good God the house is dry. Next time, Mr. Delong, you will not build a dam to drown your neighbors."

Madame Richaud's brood had crept down from the

top of the hill. Germaine, swearing mightily, stood in the door, mourning his ruined barn. Fragments of broken cloud thrashed across the sky; it was becoming light rapidly. Yellow water still poured by, but the crest of the flood had swept past. With it had gone irretrievably the barn, fences, one cow, the sheep, the beans, the potato plants, all Germaine's summer labor.

"Next year," he told his wife, "there will be no flood. And we will work ver' hard."

He stopped swearing and shrugged his shoulders. After all, what was the use? Why fret? He turned questioningly upon the three who came toward him. A sad submission covered his face; Norman recognized what it was and pitied him. He had known similar expressions to creep across his mother's face. In many ways she had resembled Germaine. Like him she had learned the value of thrift in the long unkind winters of the Canadas.

"We will pray the good God there are no more dams," the old man grunted, "I will speak to the priest next Sunday. And who is this comes here? You, Norman, your face is all crooked, maybe you saw a ghost! Who you bring, Julie?"

"Mr. James Delong," Julie answered, "yes, the very one." She opened the screen door. "Come, father! Will you not let a man in when he is hurt? *Zut!* You are not Christian!"

Germaine scowled. Then shrugged. After all, what difference?

"Fix another chair, mama," he directed, "quick, get this man dry by the stove. And you, Norman, you go jump like a cow in that wicked river? Come, maybe you die to-morrow of a sore chest! Somebody else is inside here, wet. A girl, Julie."

Delong released Julie's arm. Perspiration and rain mingled with river water on his forehead. He limped

ahead into the Richaud kitchen. Norman heard Sue Stocking cry out in a high startled voice. She spoke Delong's name first, and then his own. Julie spun about.

"Who is it?" she asked. "Who is the girl?"

"Susan Stocking," Norman answered, "from the lighthouse."

His voice shook a little. Anger at himself again swept over him. His eyes narrowed, in the queer way Gustaf's did so often. This would be no news to Sue Stocking, this thing that had happened to him. He might better tell her at once, with the receding flood still howling triumphantly in his ears. She had been right the first time she named him coward. She was right and Julie wrong. Julie called him brave. Brave! Julie knew nothing of risk, of danger and deep water.

"Sue!" he exclaimed. Her eyes were dry. She had not cried. All this ghastly, terrifying day she had not cried. No, you'd not expect her to cry over a catastrophe like this. It was things like pink paint that unnerved Sue; not storm. Her white duck dress was covered with mud under her torn yellow slicker. There was a long, incongruous, red scratch down the bridge of her nose.

She looked at him queerly.

"What's the matter with *you?*" she demanded.

"I . . . I . . . damn it, Sue. A sheep . . . a drowned sheep!"

She seized his arm.

"Sheep? And you thought it was . . ."

"A dog!" he confessed.

Delong broke him off.

"He saved my life."

"I did not!" Norman answered. He spoke harshly. Wasn't his own conscience denying any heroism? He ran abruptly from the room.

A motor-car had mired down in the muddy lane. A man in blue overalls was hurrying toward the Richaud house. His face was gray from fear and exertion. He asked for news of Delong. Norman led him to him.

"You're safe!" the man cried when he saw him. He wiped his eyes. Then: "I can't find your brother."

Delong winced. "You've searched?"

"This far. I was in the kitchen when she broke . . . I telephoned Madrid, told 'em it was coming."

"Walk up-stream again," Delong instructed. "Leave the car, I'll drive to Madrid. This is Peter, the gardener," he told Sue Stocking. He hesitated. Norman guessed what he was thinking.

"I'll look for your brother down-stream," he offered gruffly.

"You're wet. . . ."

"I'll dry walking."

Sue Stocking departed in the car with Delong. She had bound his ankle again with cloth that Madame Richaud supplied; borrowed a coat from Germaine and ordered Delong to wear it. As the car grunted into low speed, its wheels spinning in the mud, Sue leaned out and touched Norman's wet sleeve.

"Don't be reckless," Sue begged.

He did not reply. Hadn't he told her that a dead sheep had made a coward of him? Reckless! She who taunted him so often for not loving risk, who had heard his own confession a few minutes ago, told him now not to be reckless.

"No chance," he answered disdainfully.

His resentment was entirely against himself. He withdrew to the kitchen and pulled on the dry socks that Madame Richaud had thrust into his hands. He left his wet uniform coat hanging over a chair and put on Germaine's old sweater.

"It's a mile and a half to the nearest house," Julie said as they started walking.

They could see far down the Tamarack. A broad lake of muddy water flowed across the pastures. The flood had passed, leaving in its track a ruined valley, spotted with shallow pools. They came frequently on more dead sheep; but there was no sign of Fritz Delong. Once, crossing from stump to stump in a wood lot, Norman picked up Julie by the waist and swung her over to a drier spot.

"Not so hard, Norman," she cried, "your hands are too strong!"

"Strong? Maybe. But what good's that when you've got the name of a coward, and live up to it every time there's anything to be done?"

"This afternoon, was that being a coward? Was it a coward, Norman, who saved two men on the root-house door, brought them in when they were ready for the priest?"

She spoke soberly. In all the misery and alarm of the day she had experienced one superb emotion. She had seen Norman Erickson leap carelessly into danger without taking time for choice. Danger was not an every-day companion there on the upland farms. For the first time in her life she saw risk as splendid; not only splendid but the better part of existence. She knew now why Gustaf Erickson demanded that his son love the sea.

"You don't understand what happened, Julie," Norman said, "ask Sue Stocking."

"I did."

"What did she say?"

"She told me you were brave, Norman." Julie looked up at him quickly. "You shouldn't swear, Norman," she said.

CHAPTER XVIII

BACK TO MADRID

Madrid village had dozed through the muggy Saturday forenoon. Such weather, even in mid-summer, found its main street bare, its sidewalks deserted. At six o'clock in the evening or at nine in the morning when the stage rumbled in from Copperhead with the mail, men in white ducks and girls in bright summer dresses colored the scene for a few minutes; gasoline soiled the air; there was chatter in the post-office and then the dust of departing cars.

For two and a half months these resorters, as the villagers called them, bought their foodstuffs from the natives, as they called the villagers, and lived hilariously on Ottowa Lake. They were weak-backed citizenry, Madrid Bay thought. They fished with wooden bait. And had no more sense than to build their cottages in what was known locally as "the mosquito swamp."

It was not mail time. At Pug Downey's pool-room the men of the fishing fleet lounged in smoky idleness. Their day's hauls were cleaned, iced, and gone by express from Copperhead. It was Amos Short stirred them out; the Madrid Bay telephone switchboard was operated in his shoe store. He ran into the street, shouting.

"Flood!" Amos cried. "Delong dam's busted!"

The crowd poured out of the pool-room. Amos Short repeated his warning and ducked back into his store. It was misting slightly. A great bank of black cloud,

with orange edges, spread across the southern sky. Old Jim Nelson, who sat on the bench in front of Hans Miller's grocery, got up stiffly and limped over to the county bridge. A dozen fishermen followed him, while Pug Downey stumped in the rear. They leaned on the railing and looked up the Tamarack.

True, the water was high. But Jim Nelson had seen it higher. The banks were low where the river spread through the town to Lake Michigan. Just above the bridge, in a round willowy meadow, water seeped up past the marshes a little farther than usual. A one-story house squatted in the field, the home of Miss Jennie Price, the invalid. But the Tamarack still flowed placidly, chuckling, just a little over its banks. High of course.

"Lots of water up in the hills," some one said.

"Flood?" another laughed.

"It'd never get this far if there was, not enough water."

"It came once, high as the court-house roof. My old woman remembers it."

"Better lug your piano up-stairs," a neighbor said good-humoredly to Mel Pierce.

No one knew just what to do. No one except Amos Short, who was an imaginative man. Many hours, when the shoe business was dull, he sat dreaming, with idle hands, before his small switchboard. Once, years before, he had slept soundly while a frantic subscriber on the country line tried to summon help for a burning barn. Since then Amos Short had constructed many tragedies in his imagination. Only yesterday when he heard from a farmer that the dam on the Delong place appeared to be softening, Amos Short had planned a course of action.

Not that he expected flood. Yesterday it was only a dream in which he acted the part of hero. The dream

became real now. He shot a plug into the switchboard and spun a small crank.

"Hello!" he cried. "That you, Blind Man? Hello, coast guard? Amos Short speakin' . . . Amos Short down to Madrid . . . flood, Cap'n Parish! Flood! That's it . . . Tamarack River comin' down . . . I'm stickin' to my post, stickin' to the last minute. . . ."

He ran back into the rainy street. Townsmen still hung idly on the bridge, most of them with sheepish expressions.

"Mebbe somebody up-river is havin' a lark with us," Jim Nelson growled, "they ain't enough water in the hills . . ."

"I called the coast guard," Amos Short announced, "called Parish!"

"You what?" Nelson turned on him.

"Called the coast guard. Better run get some your belongin's. You can take 'em up to Pierce's hill. Floods is mean!"

"Don't be a dam' fool," Jim Nelson growled. He poked down the bank from the bridge toward the fish shanties. The water was high of course, but nothing to get excited about. Within the breakwaters thrust out from Lake Michigan beach, the fish boats swung snugly against their piers in the estuary of the river. The lake sulked with an oily smoky swell. Rain beat lightly on the dock. A curious yellow and black light was spreading across the sky.

Flood? Unthinkable. Monstrous. The river slipped through the town and out into the lake, attending its own piddling duties, unmindful of the little excitements of idle villagers. Amos Short put on his gold-rimmed spectacles and ran back to his switchboard. He was gone an interminable while. When he popped out to the street again, he had covered his bald head with a hat.

"Can't get Copperhead," he shouted, "wires is down!"

A half-dozen men started home when they heard this disturbing piece of news. Others twiddled their hands, glanced up the river and called Amos Short a fool. The wires were often down, weren't they? A few shuffled their feet in the mud, uncertain what to believe. They looked south at the cloudbanks massed above the hills. Old Gustaf Erickson joined the crowd on the bridge. He struck the rail with his two cedar sticks.

"What be all this?" he squalled.

No one had noticed him come. But they were accustomed to Gustaf. He was shorter, bent farther forward, thinner than when he had ordered Norman away. He coughed incessantly. His eyes were bloodshot. He wore a patched green coat instead of a slicker, and had turned up its collar about his neck though the day was warm. He limped as he walked, in spite of his cedar sticks. No one answered him. He slapped the sticks again.

"What be the matter?" he squalled. "Are ye deef?"

"Flood, maybe," a man said, "somebody thinks the dam's broke through, dam up at Delong's."

"Broke? Well, mebbe it is!" He screwed up his blue eyes and squinted searchingly at the river. "I've knowed worse things to happen. And I've knowed dams to bust! What comes o' tyin' up water? But ain't you goin' to be stoppin' it?"

"Stop it?" Some one laughed. "You try it, Gustaf!"

"I would if I was young," Gustaf cried. "Where's Jim Nelson? Where's Mel Pierce? Amos, you got that telephone contraption, ring up all the folks in the narrows! The rest o' you get along home and chase your wimmen out!"

His voice screeched. Plainly he was daft. No sane man ever pounded his crutches until they split, then flung them into the river. He carried a market basket on his arm, with a whitefish poking out of it. He dropped the basket on the floor of the bridge and hobbled in the direction of the shoe store.

"That Miss Jennie Price, she's like to get wet," he grumbled. He limped back to the bridge. Voices had lifted:

"Here she comes!"

"It *is* a flood!"

"My God, there it be!"

Like ants in a hail storm, the men of Madrid Bay fled aimlessly, an undisciplined, leaderless rout. Terror drove them in long detours. They ran toward the river, crossed the bridge uselessly, stared unbelievingly at an unbelievable thing. The river! It would be different if it were the lake. They'd know how to act. . . .

Thunders announced it. The lip of the flood, pushing broken sticks, trees, plants, drowned sheep ahead of it, rounded the river bend. It moved slowly. Alarmingly slowly. Straight toward the house of Miss Jennie Price. Pug Downey, a sack on his shoulder and his face red, stumped his peg leg along north Main Street, sweating, swearing, making for the hill. He did not turn his head once. Amos Short bobbed out of his store.

"Gustaf!" he shouted. "Run!"

"Aye, Amos. I been saying we ought to get ready." Gustaf Erickson pointed at his neighbors. "They're a poor crew. Think they've ever see water afore? Who's helpin' old Miss Jennie?"

He grew very tall suddenly; his shoulders straightened. He walked like a man half his years. Amos Short glanced apprehensively up the river. "Hurry, Gus!" he warned.

"Best be after Miss Jennie," Gustaf grumbled.

The two men slid down the bank into the lowland, wetting their feet on ground that an hour before had been dry. They entered a small ramshackle house by the rear, through uneven attachments of sheds and summer kitchens. Miss Jennie Price, a thin old woman, sat by a window, calmly watching the river rise.

"It is high water all at once," Gustaf told her. "Goin' to get you out."

"Out?" She had a robustious voice, for a person with paralysis. "I'm not going out. Not in this wet weather!"

Gustaf walked with a left-sided hitch to the window. Up the river, near the rotting hulk of the *Rebecca Q.*, a tug that had been abandoned on the muddy bank, water pushed its black, bulging forehead. A red shed, with its doors still tight shut, bumped along on the crest of a swelling torrent. Trees, stumps, fences, bits of shingle roofing, swirled beside it.

"We'd best hurry, Miss Jennie," old Gustaf barked. "Ye ain't very hefty. Amos, take the other arm of her chair."

The red barn thumped over muddy bottoms, rolled, turned a complete and undignified hand-spring, jarred the *Rebecca Q.* from her long neglected anchorage and slapped against the iron piers of the bridge. It held there a moment and flattened out. Water heaped up behind it. It lodged fast, wedged against the ironwork. A shingle roof tipped up at the side and at once held tight. A tree pushed exploring branches into the wreckage, twisted to the right, and picked up a length of wooden fence. A horse, swimming dispiritedly, as if this were only an unimportant event in unimportant life, approached the bridge, was sucked under, and did not reappear.

Pug Downey had made the foot of the hill. He

stopped, looking back. A dozen women fled behind him. One of them, carrying two flower pots tied with red crêpe paper, stumbled in the sand, dropped her flower pots, lifted her skirts, and ran toward higher ground. On the court-house roof, Mel Pierce pried up the trap-door and climbed out.

Water spread across the road to the meager line of stores. Again the Tamarack was dammed, this time by the county bridge, that caught the wreckage and piled it up like a wall, diverting the river beyond its low gravelly banks. Small waves forged across the main street. They lapped over sidewalks and poked inquisitive fingers into doors. Mel Pierce, on the court-house roof, waved his arms, shouting. There was no one to see or hear him.

The water rose knee deep in front of Hans Miller's grocery; waist deep; then a lofty runaway wave, white hatted like a breaker from the lake, lashed through lower Madrid. There was a rumble of broken doors and a thunderous howl.

The height of the flood had passed when Sue Stocking and the younger Delong arrived. Looking down the long muddy road to the square, they saw the bridge twisted askew with a pile of debris stacked atop it. A broken hen coop stuck abeam one span. Mel Pierce still perched on top of the court-house, waving his arms. And just beyond the breakwater, the Blind Man's Point lifeboat, kicking up a white wake, was speeding into the harbor. The lake lay yellow, the saffron after-shade of a great storm.

"Too late," Sue said.

"We couldn't have helped," Delong answered.

"I mean Parish." She quoted her father from force of habit. "He's always late."

The car slid down the last grade into the town. Delong had said little. He could not, for thought of

his brother. He got out of the car at the foot of the hill, a grotesque figure in wet muddy white trousers and Germaine's short baggy coat. Leaving Sue, he limped across the bridge, picking his way like a cat on a narrow fence. Two coast guardsmen already had leaped ashore, running up the stone cribs of the breakwater, one with a pike-pole and ax, the other with a coil of line. They wore bulky cork jackets and came with an easy businesslike pace.

"The rich Delongs!" he heard the first one mutter.

James Delong winced. He had suspected that there would be censure of his family. He trod through the mud to Captain Parish.

"Well, I'll be sunk ashore!" the coast guard commander said violently. He stood by an overturned wagon. "That devil river! Give me the lake every time. You, Delong?"

The latter nodded. "I've lost a brother, Parish."

"Drownded?"

James Delong shivered. "I don't know. I want to search. A good many need help."

"That devil river!" Parish exclaimed again. He turned on Delong suddenly, as if he had remembered. "It was your dam!"

"My dam," Delong answered.

"Humph!" commented Parish. He called to his crew. "Hi . . . Anderson . . . Shay . . . Baker . . . get some speed on!"

Pug Downey arrived first from the hills. He began talking at once. The other townsmen came silently, without words to express their thoughts. They came cautiously, fishermen and fishermen's wives, stepping into water as if they never before had felt its cold touch. It was inconceivable. The Tamarack River . . . any river . . . attacking them, who loved the lake. They whispered when they recognized Delong.

"There's one of 'em!" Pug Downey cried. "Ruint and spoilt my pool-tables." He stamped his wooden leg on the sidewalk. James Delong turned.

"Are you talking to me or about me?" he asked. "Whichever it is, stop it."

Downey retreated.

"I got a game leg, mister, don't go picking a fight with me!"

"Mind your tongue, then," Delong answered. He returned to the commander of the coast guard. "There's a devil of a current running, Captain. I just crossed the bridge. It's not solid, but a man can make it. There's a house just below it, over there . . ." He pointed toward the home of Miss Jennie Price. "Water to the window tops."

"Go search it, Anderson," Captain Parish ordered his nearest man. "Take one of those fishermen with you. You, Baker, start up-stream. Search the hollows. Houses all along there. Mind the deep pools. And keep away from overhanging banks. And, Baker, watch for that Delong."

Ed Baker growled.

"I'll watch for none o' their tribe!"

James Delong clenched his fists.

"Mind what you say, Baker!"

"Mind your fancy lake next time," Baker answered. He crossed the road to Pug Downey. "Sure, he's to blame," he told Downey contemptuously, "he knows it. He's smart enough, don't need to be a lawyer to know that! Damages is what the town ought to have, you, everybody else. We'll get 'em if there's any justice."

"Ruint my pool-tables!"

"We'll get him!" Baker promised.

James Delong returned to Susan. He had forgotten his ankle. Talking rapidly, he gave her instructions.

"That's a church?" he pointed up the hill.

"Mission, we call it."

"Find the key, open it. There'll be folks hunting a dry place to sleep to-night. Get some blankets. And have some one make coffee . . . hello!" He stared nervously at the river. "They're getting a fellow out."

It was not his brother Fritz. A fat agonized French-Canadian farmer, too frightened to speak, had floated to safety astride a corn crib.

Women from the neighborhood were helping Sue when Delong limped into the mission house an hour later. Chairs had been cleared aside. Fire hummed in a stove in the corner. A fussy shaking woman brewed coffee. Delong, driving his car recklessly on the road east of town, had found a telephone line intact and by a roundabout method had summoned Doctor McCarthy of Copperhead.

"We've done all we can," Captain Parish told the lawyer. "I ought to get back to the station. I can leave two men."

"We need them," Delong agreed. "And Parish, will you tell Susan Stocking's father that she's all right?"

Three hours later, just before sundown, while Madrid Bay still complained miserably of its catastrophe, Julie Richaud and Norman Erickson staggered into town. They had aided two Bohemian families on the way down-stream, and labored foolishly to rescue a black and white pig. Norman had needed to swim to reach one of the Bohemians, a woman who did not speak English, who perched stupidly on the roof of a one-room shack. The water was shallow where it touched her house and she might have helped herself down. But when Norman climbed up to her, she fought like a cat against his lifting her, and screamed as he carried her to dry land.

"*Zut!* These foreigners!" Julie had grumbled.

"We are all alike," Norman answered.

Julie gripped his arm.

"We are not," she contradicted. "This time your father should be proud. What matter all you tell me just now of that sheep? It was only a small part of the day!"

Norman shook his head. His clothes again were soaking wet, even Germaine's sweater and the warm socks. He had cut his left leg on submerged barbed wire, swimming to the Bohemian woman. His back ached with exertion. His eyes burned. He dreaded to face Madrid. A cold settled feeling replaced the scorn he had felt for himself. The world had ceased to call him a coward . . . out of pity, he suspected . . . and now he called himself one. He did not blame his father this time for what had happened. Nor lake nor land. Only himself. He had thought with quickening heart of Gustaf since leaving Germaine Richaud's house. He wanted very much to see him, to see the fierce brown face, listen to the blustery voice.

Here he was, returning to Madrid for the first time since Gustaf drove him away, a day when the whole fishing fleet, and his father the loudest, called him a coward. He had not deserved the name that day! But what had occurred since? First a dog, now a sheep . . . nothing Delong might say could help the facts.

"My father bade me stay away from here," he told Julie. He cleared his throat savagely to conceal his agitation.

"Stay away after a day like this? I will tell him! I will tell him how you swam!"

"You will tell him nothing."

Julie shrugged.

"Nothing? Not a word? When he talked so to me that Sunday on the bridge? Certainly I will tell him."

"You'll stay away from him," Norman commanded.

He foresaw what their meeting would be. Gustaf would storm. He would rage up and down the dock, or wherever Norman came upon him . . . again order his son to stay out of his sight. What chance was there to explain to a man like Gustaf how his hands tangled in the wet wool of a sheep? Gustaf would find ecstatic mirth in an excuse like that!

They circled a hill and came out above the town.

"Look!" Julie cried. "Look at the bridge!"

Norman gazed a long, long minute. He understood what had happened. The bridge had ruined the town. It had caught the flood and prevented it from escaping to the lake. It had been unjust and merciless to people who loved water and who desired to live near it. It was incongruous to him that Madrid Bay should have suffered from flood. He glanced at Julie. There were fresh tears in her eyes.

This time, inexplainably, he could not reproach her for tears. Certainly she had accepted her part in the day's ordeal. Waist deep in flood she had labored to rescue her foolish sheep, with as little dismay of the water as if she spent her life swimming in it. She walked with extreme weariness now. She stumbled in the wet sand, but when he put out his hand to steady her, she pushed it away.

"I'm all right," she protested. She pointed toward the mission house. "That's Doctor McCarthy's car . . . and there's Amos Short with a pot of coffee."

"I'm not aiming to talk much to folks," Norman said. His voice rumbled with a false show of strength. A stubborn light shone in his hard blue eyes. Here he was, back home. And he had not meant to return until he could come unashamed.

He would have a drink of coffee, then look up his father at once.

At the door of the mission house Julie hung back shyly. She never had been inside this building. There was a great deal of talk for one small yellow-painted room. The boards of the floor were slippery with mud. She smelled coffee. Doctor McCarthy was joking in a loud voice while he dressed a little girl's arm. Julie recognized her as a Bohemian child, from a family on the outskirts of town. A fat man with his head in white bandages sat stiffly in a chair in the middle of the room.

"I lost three cows," a woman's voice complained.

"They did good work, those coast guards," a man remarked.

Another, forgetting the church, swore vindictively at the two Delongs.

"I want some coffee," Norman said determinedly.

He let Julie step ahead of him into the room. At a table near the door, Sue Stocking, in a blue apron much too large for her, was cutting loaves of bread. She looked at him oddly, he thought. She put down the knife slowly and came toward him.

"Norman!" she called.

Julie flushed and drew back. Sue's voice was affectionate. And by her manner she wanted to speak to Norman and to no one else.

"Sit down somewhere," she directed Julie, "I must talk to him alone."

Norman waited inquiringly. An uneasy surprised expression came over his long face. Julie, watching across her shoulder, sat down suddenly with her back to the door. For she had seen Sue's arm about Norman's shoulder, had seen Sue's lips close to Norman's ear. And all Madrid Bay looking on. Well, what of it? What did it matter?

"Here's a dry blanket," a woman suggested. "You'll take your death of cold. Best put it 'round you."

Julie took it, and in adjusting its folds, glanced again after Norman.

"Are you all right, Norman?" Sue was asking.

"Yes, of course! You?"

She nodded.

"Have you seen my father?" he demanded. He stopped shortly. He had not meant to ask this just yet. Again Sue nodded. They were alone now, out on the sand.

"Norman," she whispered, "let me have your hand . . . you're awfully cold! Norman, your father . . . drowned."

CHAPTER XIX

A SAILOR'S DEATH

GUSTAF ERICKSON died wet, as his father had died before him, off the coast of Iceland, and his grandfather before that, two days out of Christiana. He had died heroically in the act of rescue. He had died swearing, abusing the fates that in his heart he loved. He had died fighting. He had died a man's death.

He had died still believing his son to be a coward.

On the low muddy flat between Miss Jennie's house and the rising ground behind it, the first broad wave had swept him off his feet. It knocked the woman's chair from his hands and sent Amos Short in unintentional flight. Miss Jennie prayed without emotion while she felt the cold water rise about her paralyzed legs. She did not oppose it. Old Gustaf fought alone, his last blind battle against the element that his father as well as he, his grandfather and those countless fathers before them had spent their lonely lives trying to conquer. And the element won, as elements always win, in spite of the courageous strivings of little men.

His legs could not stand as they once had. Head bent down, he cursed the river. Its water spurted at his face like spray from the bow of a beating vessel. It rose to his armpits, yanked at his old green coat, filled his shoes, weighted him, dragged him in its undertow. He died happy, trying to swim.

Anderson of the coast guard found the body on the beach, back of Gustaf's own fish shanty, after the flood

had passed. A gill net, wrenched from a drying reel, wrapped itself about him like a shroud. He had torn at its mesh, had ripped it, had struggled with the last of his immense strength to free himself from it. It was well made. It held firm. It was his own net.

And it was into his own fishing shack that men carried his body, laid it upon the floor and left it dripping. They closed the door quietly after them and grumbled on with their work, swearing mildly at the perversities of existence. They found Miss Jennie drowned in her chair against the apple tree behind her house. Amos Short had returned down the hill once the yellow torrent passed, and tried, puffing, to lift her body. He was back in his ruined store now, pecking at the dead telephone switchboard.

Pug Downey stood again in his pool-room. He had carried wood from the hilltop and in spite of the August day kindled a fire in the wet stove. Twice he swept water and mud into the street. He lighted lamps in mid-afternoon and invited spent grumbling men to come in and sit down.

"If it wasn't for me," he explained, "they'd of been more got it. Game leg and all, it was me as stirred 'em out. I run. . . ."

"Sure you run!" a sick fisherman exploded.

"I run hollerin', stirrin' 'em out. 'Flood!' I called!"

"You didn't stir anybody out."

Downey scowled, and stumped behind his small bar. For the sake of future business he needed to reinstate himself some way or other in these men's opinions. He lifted a trap-door and looked down reflectively into darkness, then lighted a candle, thrust it ahead of him.

"There's some good stuff to drink down here," he called over his shoulder, "made it myself. Water's dreening away. Mebbe we can get at it."

So it happened that Madrid Bay went to bed drunk on the night of its tragedy. Pug Downey, currying favor, dispensed his liquor freely, and coastmen in wet jackets, honest, superstitious men who lately had handled Gustaf Erickson's cold body, thanked him and warmed their spirits.

Only Jim Nelson refused to be cheered.

"Have a shot, Jim?" Downey asked, wiping a fresh jug.

"No." Nelson rubbed his eyes. "He was a good shipmate, Gustaf."

Ed Baker, opening the door, heard the remark.

"He was daft as a jay bird," he said, "what's the loss?"

"Loss?" repeated Jim Nelson. A pathetic smile worked across his slow brown face. He took the glass of whisky that Downey offered again, examined its thick, slightly reddish contents, and set it down absent-mindedly upon the bar. He limped nearer Baker, towering over him, so close that the surfman's cap only reached Nelson's hard stubbly chin. "Daft? Mebbe he was daft back there in them nineties when he grabbed me out of a sea you never saw the likes of. Mebbe he was daft three, four year back, when he saved your own stepfather, lifting nets. . . ."

"Aye, that's so, Baker!" a fisherman cut in.

"Daft, mebbe," repeated Nelson. He wiped tears from his pale blue eyes.

"That's what I said," Baker answered, "and he's got a fish-livered son."

"Float away, Baker." A murmur arose from the crowd. "Now's no time for that."

"It isn't?" Baker laughed morosely. "Why not? You can't give me any squashy soap about Ericksons. I know 'em. Who's the boy sailin' with now? A Delong! 'Mister James Delong out of Grand Haven.'"

The crowd growled. This was fairer talk about Delong. They could understand Baker's accusations there. If it weren't for the family of Delong, Madrid Bay would be enjoying now all the splendor of an August Saturday night. Those Delongs were outsiders. Baker was right.

"It's the truth, Ed," agreed Pug Downey.

"The flood wasn't their fault altogether," Jim Nelson argued.

"It wasn't? Ho! Well, whose was it then?"

They hooted him out of the pool-room. He was shaking his head as he turned in the direction of the mission house. He found Norman Erickson near the stove where Sue Stocking had put him. There was an attitude of an old man about him, sitting with his shoulders hunched. Julie Richaud brooded over him; she carried a cup of coffee which Norman now refused. He looked at Nelson dully.

"I been bailing your father's boat, Norman," the fisherman said. "He wouldn't want anything to happen to that boat, Gustaf wouldn't. You take her, Norman. How else you get home?"

"Thanks, Jim," Norman answered. He covered his face with his hands. Nelson limped away bow-leggedly, saying no more, either of blame or condolence. Norman groaned. Certainly old Jim had been faithful to Gustaf, whether his son had been or not.

He turned to Sue. She had forbidden that he leave the mission house.

"I ought to go . . ." he begged.

"Up to your own house? Not to-night, Norman."

"Keep him here," she instructed Julie Richaud. "Right here, among lights and people."

Julie nodded her black head. She had wept when Sue told her the news.

"So that is why you take him off alone!" she had

cried. "I am a wicked, jealous girl! Poor Norman. He was not happy with his father. They were two strong wills together. You have seen two chickens, pull, pull, pull at the same worm? Norman is born this way, and this . . ." she spread apart the fingers of her right hand. "Here he is French, like his mother, and here Scandihoovin, and so he gets all mixed up. I fancy he is just like this inside his mind," she crossed her fingers. "But he did love his father."

"I think he did, too," Sue answered.

She started up. James Delong had entered the door; with him was a town fisherman who had piloted him up-stream in a battered launch, searching for his brother Fritz. Delong's skin was colorless, his eyes were disheartened. She went to meet him.

"Any luck?" she whispered.

"None," he answered. His voice quavered. "Fritz didn't make it. You've heard the rest, Sue? I drowned Erickson's father!"

"No, no!" she protested.

He cried out at her savagely. "Didn't I? Who else did? I'm to blame for all this! Young Erickson warned me! He told me the dam would burst . . ."

"Aye, but sayin' it didn't bring the rain," said an old voice.

Delong swung around. Jim Nelson stood at his elbow, a felt hat in his stiff red hands and his hands shaking, the smell of fish on his garments.

"Who are you?" Delong asked.

"Jim," Nelson answered.

"Jim who? My own name's Jim!"

"Nelson. Forty years . . . aye, forty-one it is . . . I knowed Gustaf Erickson. He was my shipmate, mister. I learn what he thinks, he learns what I think, those forty-one years. He would not blame you. No, not Gustaf. He loved a storm, mister. Sailors feel

best a-dyin' in water, old sailors. He was feared last year, feared he might die abed. . . ."

"Thanks, Nelson."

"Aye, you're welcome. But I come to tell something else."

"To tell me?"

"Aye," Nelson fidgeted with his hat and looked at Sue. "They's a lot of drinkin' over there. The one-legged wart gives it away to-night. It don't do, mister, for gover'ment uniforms to get drunk."

"Who?" asked Delong.

"Captain Parish is gone. He leaves Baker on duty. Him and another."

"The captain's not particular who's on duty."

"Aye, he's not." Nelson ducked his head again toward Sue. Delong understood.

"I think Miss Richaud wants you," he suggested.

"Wants me?" she went away quickly. Delong turned back to Nelson.

"Now what is it, sir? What do you have to tell me?"

"They's makin' trouble, mister."

"Who are?"

"Downey and Baker, most. But the others is ripe. They say they're goin' to get you, 'fore you leave town to-night. Been sayin' it all afternoon. Funny the way some folks won't understand. . . ."

"Understand what?"

"Understand it was the rain as done it, mister."

"Oh!" said Delong. He frowned, with his hand across his face. "You mean then, Nelson, that the men over in town are angry at me because my dam went out?"

"That's it."

"And they're planning trouble?"

"That's it," replied Nelson.

"Thanks," Delong answered, "I'll go see."

"I'll come along," offered Nelson.

"No. Better not. You live here. You don't want to make enemies. Thanks again. I'll take Erickson."

A half-dozen men loitered in front of the pool-room, talking in low mutters. Delong examined the crowd with a quick eye. He knew none of them; none except the pilot of the boat he had paid well an hour before, and that individual gave him a friendly nod. A stuffy odor of smoke and poor alcohol swept out into the damp air as he opened the door. Oil lamps were burning; one on the wall in a tilted bracket smoked furiously.

Norman, who had come with Delong silently, stared about the room with an unexpected curiosity. It had been a long time since he loafed in Pug Downey's place. The same dried alligator skin hung on the wall, the same pictures of a hunter shooting ducks and of a girl in red tights; greasy it seemed after the lighthouse. He saw Pug Downey, peeking around the end of the bar.

"I'm looking for Ed Baker," Delong announced distinctly.

The loafers at the bar started. They were huge men for the most part, with long arms and red faces; a few were bow-legged, even as Jim Nelson. In their midst Baker appeared stunted.

"He's here," Pug Downey answered. "Have a drink?" A servile eagerness colored his voice.

"I don't want a drink, thank you."

"Mean you won't drink with *us?*" asked Baker.

He stepped through the group insolently. He held a glass in one hand; an enormous red hand that was out of proportion with the rest of his body.

"I mean I won't drink with *you,*" James Delong answered. "It's not my habit to drink with thieves!" He reached forward vigorously and struck the surfman in the face. The glass shattered on the floor.

Baker struck back.

"Thief?" he shouted. "Me?"

"Yes, you!" Delong answered. He struck again. "Keep back, Erickson. This is my battle." He sought Baker's ribs, with a blow that found a resting place. "You're a thief. You tried to rob me the night I came ashore. And you're a liar. And a bully. And a low sneaking gossip, Baker." He punctuated each charge with a blow.

Baker resisted the attack. But he was unprepared. From the standpoint of the audience, who had watched Baker use his big hands many times with happy results, the red-haired Delong won before the surfman started.

"You're fine material for the coast guard," the lawyer said, brushing off his borrowed coat. "Now if any of the rest of you gentlemen have anything to say about that dam . . ."

"I guess it wasn't your idee the thing would break," Pug Downey cut in hurriedly.

"No, it wasn't my idea," Delong answered. "God knows that, but it may have been my fault."

The crowd heard with embarrassment. None spoke. Only Ed Baker, seeking the exit, on the way passed Norman.

"Oh, you," he muttered under his breath, "well, I'll pay you a nice price for this, Erickson!"

Out in the wet unlighted street, Delong reached down and rubbed his ankle.

"We're on edge, all of us," he said. "We'd better be getting home. I can drive you, Erickson."

"I have my father's boat," Norman answered. "I don't know about Julie."

"I go her way. If you'll take Sue . . ." he hesitated. "I'd like to hurry, Erickson. There's just a chance some one may have come across Fritz."

Norman waited outside the mission house; he was unwilling to face more people. A chill air had settled with the darkness. He shivered. Damp clothing rubbed his skin. There had been no chance to dry off completely. His legs ached horribly. His head burned. Unreal, monstrous, this whole business here in Madrid seemed, unreal and monstrous as the entire day. The sight of the stars in the cleared sky annoyed him as he glanced aloft. There they twinkled, each in its place, as if the tragic antics of a crazy world were none of their heavenly affair. They looked a long way off to-night and very cold, as cold as ice, as remote as strangers, as disinterested, as unsympathetic. For the first time in his life he wished for clouds to clothe them decently, to cover them, to shield them from his eyes.

Few lights burned in the town. In a hollow of darkness below the hill, the disgraced Tamarack River hid its shame. Norman shook a wet mist from his eyes. A chill wind, that came from nowhere, struck across his shoulder-blades. Down there at the edge of the black lake behind a fish house door lay his father. Gustaf was dead. And he had believed his son "afeared."

Norman felt relieved when the others appeared. He did not speak as Julie left, only held her warm hands. The lights of the Delong car made swaying ribbons up the Tamarack road, jerked suddenly to the left, and disappeared around a bend. Sue Stocking drew the assistant keeper's arm into her own.

"I'm so sorry," she whispered; her voice reminded him of his mother's. Why had he ever thought her aloof? "Let's start," she added, "it's a two-hour run."

Together they felt their way down the embankment, climbed over the insecure bridge and turned toward the fish houses. A kerosene lantern smoked in the window of the Erickson shack. Jim Nelson, drawing on his pipe, stood stiffly in the door, feet wide apart. His

shadow was blocked in grotesque angles. He held rigid, as if his silhouette were cut out of iron.

He pulled shut the door when he heard footsteps, and snapped a hasp and padlock. Norman was glad for the sound. He had not yet seen his father, who lay there on the floor. To-morrow would be better; his head might not burn so. He turned on the beam of the flash that Delong had lent him.

"You," Nelson said. His voice was low and tired. "I thought I'd help you off, Norman. I already run the boat out there . . . last berth, near the end of the pier. I'll help you start her. The engine, she be kind of tricky."

He piloted them down the dock to the squat gasoline boat with its broad-roofed cabin. Lifting the trap, he fumbled inside. Norman's flashlight shone in his eyes.

"Keep it off," the old man bade, "they blind me, them new kind o' lamps. I know my way in the dark, like."

They spoke in whispers, as if the sound of their words might disturb old Gustaf. The motor turned over, choked, and began its slow cadence. Nelson climbed out wearily, with the air of another duty not neglected. Sue found a place quietly on the stern deck. She had said nothing since arriving at the shanty. Norman searched for the tiller with his feet, caught it familiarly between his shoes.

"I'll cast ye off," Nelson offered, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand. "Your sidelights is kindled." Then, troubled, he added: "Mebbe you'll be comin' back up to-morrow, Norman? They's arrangements and things . . ."

"Before noon," Norman answered. "Thanks, Jim."

"You're welcome. He was my friend, your father. I know him better than you do, Norman. He had a

hard tongue, you think. Yes, that's true. Folks he liked best, he quarreled with. You, me, your mother . . . still, he was a good shipmate, Gustaf was."

"I know it, Jim."

"Good night, Norman. Catch that line there, don't let it twist around the shaft. And watch the bar. She's shifted a mite to the south this summer."

The fish boat pointed her nose toward the open lake. Current and an urging propeller hurried her past the pier-head light, gleaming a fretful red. She spun on the ground swell. Far to the southwest Blind Man's Eye gazed across the water, unwinking, clear, sharp, a positive and unhesitant beam. It gave Norman relief to see the light, relief from all this day's happenings.

A fresh wind, with a keen edge on its tail, cut out of the west. The boat tumbled slightly, dipping her nose under immature rollers. Spray stung the faces of the man and the girl, leaning close together. Norman shifted the tiller under his heels.

"I can find a sou'wester', maybe, in the locker."

"Never mind."

"You'll be wet again."

"Never mind," once more. Then: "I don't mind this. It's lake water."

Far to the right, the horizon flickered with the luminance of northern lights, pink, orange, purple. The water sent back their glow, mirrored in triangular patches. Overhead the stars shone like glistening beads upon black velvet drapery. Below, on the crests of smooth rollers, their reflections grew long braids like comets, flashed into nothing, reappeared serenely. Again Norman wished for clouds.

"Norman," Sue whispered softly.

In a dim reflection of stars and northern lights, he watched her face. He watched her lips, trembling ever

so little, and her eyes, which seemed very large and not so steady as usual. "I know, Norman, there's nothing I can say. But you know how sorry I am."

"I know."

"For . . . for everything, Norman. You were fine this morning. If you hadn't been brave . . ."

"But I wasn't! I yelled at a sheep!"

Sue touched his arm.

"That wasn't your fault, Norman."

"Whose was it?"

"Your father's."

"No! *He* never near drowned for a sheep!"

"You'll get over that, Norman. It's silly, childish. You'll *have* to get over it. But you did a good job of rescue." Another silence. "So that's where you visit in the hills."

"Where?"

"At the Richauds'. She's a very fine girl."

He was peering straight ahead at the punctual unwavering glow in the lantern of Blind Man's Eye. Staunch, loyal, constant as the pole star, it guided him home. He disregarded her remark.

"There's a little more wind," he observed quietly.

Rollers grew braver farther out, with a heavier sway. Sue stood a long time silent, her face toward the beam on Blind Man's Reef.

"You know, there's no hope," she said finally. "For Mr. Delong's brother, I mean. He was in the middle of the current."

"I figured that. It was contrary, that current."

"Julie told me that you swam as if it were a still pool, that you fought it and beat it every time, down at that Bohemian shack."

"Wasn't dangerous. Just a river. No use being scared of a river."

"I wish I could have seen it."

"Why?" Norman eased the tiller off a point to starboard.

"Because one doesn't see half enough fine things in one's life, Norman." Her voice was low against the evening wind. Norman scarcely heard it.

A wave splashed along the boat, struck at their faces and spattered their soggy shoes. Another followed it, and then a third. The fishing craft dived, lifted, spun her propeller in the air, nosed under again, and flung more rough water along its length. It was not a heavy sea, merely choppy, the product of a new wind; short jabs, like blows of a muscular forearm. A fair night so far, Norman reflected, after a rainy day. But let the wind keep on working westward, and by morning the lake would be pounding, breakers running ashore with long positive strides.

"I best look for some oilskins," he said, "we'll both be stiff as salted whitefish."

Already his shoulders were drenched. Sue must be soaked through. He remembered the yellow slicker she had worn that morning, and asked her about it.

"Torn to pieces," she answered, and then: "Norman, did you see Ed Baker to-day?"

"Yes."

"I distrust him, Norman."

"Nothing there to distrust. He's not so plucky."

His eyes sought Blind Man's light. He was steering too far west, he discovered. He changed his course, pointing directly at the enlarging beacon. They were half-way across the bay now.

"There must be oilskins, Sue. I'll look. You steady the tiller . . . that's it . . . step right across. Thanks."

He drew the flashlight from his pocket and bent his head to slip into the trap to the engine compartment. He was not so familiar with the cabin as Nelson. Fumbling, he directed the flash ahead of him.

With a surprised cry, he dropped the lamp on the wet rolling deck. He had seen a man just inside the cabin. A short fellow with a flat face. Wearing the blue sweater of the coast guard. Ed Baker, moving aft from the bow easy as a cat! His large mouth was smiling. In his hand twisted the favorite weapon of the fishing coast, a long broad-bladed scaling knife.

Norman leaped backward, pushing Sue out of range. Baker's face poked up after him, still smiling. Northern lights reflected frostily on the blade of his knife. Without a word, one strong red hand clenched, the other raised cunningly, the surfman lifted his head and charged.

CHAPTER XX

COMBAT

Gustaf Erickson's fish boat slid unpiloted up the side of a black wave. Its tiller banged excitedly. There was a hush on deck after Sue Stocking's first hysterical cry. Softly, the scaling knife in his big right hand, Ed Baker crept out of the cabin, still smiling. A smell of gasoline and hot oil blew up from the engine. Norman threw off Germaine's tight sweater; for the second time in his life he must fight Ed Baker . . . Ed had beaten him before. . . .

"I got you where I want you, Erickson!" Baker challenged.

Again Sue Stocking screamed.

The surfman swung about. He had not seen her or heard her until that minute. Below in the cabin with the humming flywheel and two thundering cylinders, hiding quietly far forward where even old Nelson had not discovered him, he heard only footsteps come aboard, could not hope to hear voices speaking on deck. It was too late now. She had seen him. A new rage overwhelmed him when he recognized her. It had been because of Sue that he gave up a prosperous fishing partnership and enlisted in the coast guard. And no sooner had he arrived at Blind Man station than she turned her back upon him.

And now, when he had schemed to meet Norman Erickson alone, to fight it out with only the disinterested stars for witnesses . . . here she was, in the way. In

the way as Norman had been in his way before. He could not finish Erickson in the manner he planned. Not with Sue looking on. Purposely he dropped the fish knife.

Norman moved ever so slightly toward the banging tiller. Baker spun in his way. Hard, cold and gray, the lights outlined his face, staring sober, no matter how strong Pug Downey's home-made liquor had been. Sue edged to the low iron rail. She gave another short cry as the two men met.

"Stop it, Ed Baker!" she screamed.

He paid no attention . . . too late to pay attention if he wished. It was a leaping attack, both pairs of open hands cutting through the air, one toward the other. The deck was small for a man-sized fight, less than eight feet square, and pitching insanely; the tiller slammed left and right.

Norman choked as the other's fingers caught his throat, squeezing in. He clawed at Baker's right wrist for a moment; no longer than a moment; like anchor chains those muscles felt.

"I got you where I want!" Baker cried again through his teeth.

He flung headlong at Norman. The two clinched. The boat jerked under their scuffing feet. They thrashed down, Baker atop. Norman's hands, sweeping the darkness before him, clamped upon the other's left shoulder. It squirmed away easily. Baker kicked. A quick chilly sensation ran up Norman's spine. He rolled over, grappled and again the two floundered on the slippery deck. They gripped tight, chest to chest, cheek to cheek. A minute they held the posture, muscles tense, each striving by the strength of his bare hands to break the other's body.

Baker pushed forward. Norman felt himself grow very tired. He was outmatched, he realized, and the

pith gone from his bones. His open eyes looked up at the star-peppered sky. He thought confusedly of Blind Man's Eye, of his dead father, of Julie Richaud, crying, of Sue Stocking, here, somewhere near by. Between his face and the night sky bulked Ed Baker's head. Baker was on top again, shaking, pounding, swearing in a hoarse, vicious monotone. The sound of his voice was broken by a command from Sue Stocking.

"Fight him, Norman! Fight him!" Then in five seconds: "I'll help!"

A short string of net sinkers rolled drunkenly across the deck. Sue crawled forward and picked them up. She cried out angrily as she hurled them. They missed Baker's head and fell overside with the plop of heavy lead.

"Never mind . . . I . . . got him!"

Baker's grip weakened for a moment. Norman squirmed. He was on his left side now, his right hand was free. It swung up, beat down. Again it lifted. Again it fell. This time it missed the pliability of Baker's body. Under its blow the scaling knife rattled. Norman gripped its handle, saw its blade gleam in the light of the stars, held it an uncertain moment, and flung it overboard. It sparkled as it cut the black water.

The neglected boat wallowed in a series of narrow troughs. Norman slid to one knee. He was blind, now, and deaf, and the sense of his fingers had left him.

"Fight!" he ordered himself grimly. "Fight!" he commanded. "Fight . . . like . . . an Erickson . . . I tell you, fight!"

Some of Gustaf's stubborn will came into his knees. He pushed Baker upward; Baker's hand smashed against his nose before his own knuckles could find the coast guardsman's face. With a great heave both men stood up, Norman pommeling. Then he bent; Baker

slid over his shoulder; he lifted, jabbed and a heavy body blundered across the low rail.

The black lake opened with a mighty splash. An eddy circled atop the water and then its surface reflected the calm faces of the stars.

"Norman!"

"Yes."

"He's overboard, Norman!"

"I know it. I threw him there."

He grabbed the iron rail atop the deckhouse and caught the tiller between his heels.

"All right, Sue?" he panted. His feet worked to port. The tiller turned with them. The boat steered in a circle.

"I'm right enough. What are you doing? Norman, what are you doing?"

"Find the flashlight . . . it's somewhere there on deck. Hold it overside."

The boat swung in a wide erratic arc. A commotion stirred the water just ahead, and Norman eased over a point in its direction. The beam of the flash lamp played through the darkness. The tiller banged across. On the starboard rail Norman doubled like a jack-knife and rose into the air. A voice cried from the water. Then Norman came up, panting and clutched for the side. He held Baker's collar in his left hand. He yanked himself up with a convulsive struggle, pulled the other man after him. Baker groaned as his legs dragged over the side. Erickson the coward, Erickson the landsman, Erickson his enemy had thrown him into the lake and immediately pulled him out of it.

"Let his head hang over," Norman said. "Drain some of the water out of him."

He dropped down exhausted. Baker lay quiet against the cabin.

"Norman, Norman," Sue leaned over him, "look at me!"

Norman opened his eyes.

"What can I do? Norman, tell me! What can I do?"

"Please . . . get off my hand," he whispered.

Sue leaped backward. She laughed hysterically.

"I'm sorry! I'll steer. Brace yourself . . . one side a little. That's better. I'll take her in."

Norman's lungs were bursting; there must be an anchor atop them. What was it about her voice? That funny twist to it? He never had heard Sue speak like that before. Like his father's voice, wasn't it? No . . . not his father. His father was dead. He slumped wearily against the bulkhead, staring back as if in a dream at the dim pier-head light of Madrid Bay.

Dead . . . back there. What was his son doing here? Fighting? Nothing to fight about. Sue's voice? It was like her own father's, that was it. Like Capt'n Samuel's. He'd be glad to see the keeper. Like coming home after being away among strangers a long time. He closed his eyes.

"Think Julie's all right?" he asked sleepily.

"Julie? Of course. Of course Julie's all right!"

There was something wistful and gentle in Sue's voice. Not so much like Samuel Stocking's after all. It reminded him of Julie's this time, of Julie with her funny little phrases, learned back in the hills, from rackety old folks out of the Canadas.

"Can you give me a hand?" Sue asked at length.

"Sure." Norman raised on one elbow. Blind Man's Eye cast a friendly and welcoming radiance across the uneasy countenance of the water. Blind Man's Eye! Home! He felt the boat bump against the piling of the lighthouse dock. Funny his knees

wouldn't stand. He reached out for the cabin and pulled himself upright. A short, bareheaded man puffed down the planks. Norman heard his voice as if from a long way off.

"By the hoky poky, Sue . . . are you there, daughter? Heaven above be praised! And me boy Norman, is he there? Such a day off! You'll be taking no more of them! Floods! Who'd think it? I've been that upset I busted my glasses, Sue . . . turn off that engine, Erickson . . . I can't hold all night ag'in' forty horse-power . . . busted my glasses and let the coffee pot boil dry. Dry as dirt . . . nothin' left of it . . . and why'd you stay so late?"

The keeper scrambled down to the end of the dock, took the stern line and made two half-hitches about a cedar pole.

"Sorry about your father, boy," this to Norman. "Parish told me. Sakes above, what's that? Sue . . . what's that head a-hangin' overside? Are ye bringin' home a dead man?"

"That's Ed Baker," Sue told him, "he's not dead."

"His head'll bump the dock, Sue!"

"Let it bump! I don't care!"

Norman turned off the engine, feeling very hollow and very sick. As the boat ceased its slatting, Baker lifted to his elbows and dropped back muttering.

"He's playing dead," Norman grunted. "Here, Captain Stocking, help me with this lummox. No, he isn't much hurt. Not so much as he might be. Only about half drowned."

He pulled Baker heavily to the dock. Captain Stocking, grumbling, asking heaven with every breath what the world was coming to, lifted the surfman's right shoulder, Norman his left. The assistant keeper's feet weaved as he walked through the sand. The light of Blind Man's Eye shone down mistily on the pro-

cession. Once in the parlor, Norman released his hold on Baker and dropped into Captain Stocking's chair. His head sank forward and his hands moved restlessly over his wet knees.

"And what might be the meanin' of such carryin's-on as this?" the keeper demanded of his daughter.

He scratched his head, felt for the broken glasses, loosened his left suspender, sat down abruptly and took off his boots. In his gray knit socks he crossed to the couch and squinted down at Baker, who was moaning.

"Well, has a sturgeon got your tongue?" Stocking demanded of Sue. "What's happened now? By hoky poky, I've got to go back to sea mighty quick if I'm to have any peace in my old age, Susan Stocking. Such goings-on, since I come to live ashore! Susan Stocking, what's happened?" He jumped at Norman. "Erickson, have you been fighting again? You got to have fights as regular as sunup? And they called you a coward! My lor' . . . there I go, swearin' to myself all afternoon!"

Norman arose sickly to his feet.

"Yes, sir, I've been fighting again."

"He's not a coward," Sue interrupted. "Norman, go to bed."

"Fightin' with Ed Baker?" Captain Stocking squalled.

"Go to bed!" Sue commanded.

The old businesslike vigor had returned to her voice.

Norman obeyed. He slept immediately. After ten minutes he awakened screaming, and found Sue beside him. She pushed his hands back under the blankets.

"That's all right," she told him soothingly, "you're home, Norman."

"And he might be more partic'lar what language he sleeps with!" Captain Stocking suggested from the dark corridor.

"Sorry," Norman muttered, and turned over. He could not remember all that had happened; but slipping back into drowsiness he recalled a flood. "Where's Julie?" he demanded.

No one answered. There was something else he wanted to ask, something about his father . . . but that could wait. Could it? Well, scarcely. It had been months since he saw his father. He stirred on the bed. He'd had trouble with him . . . was that it? A long time ago. He'd like to fix that up, like to see the old man. . . . He slept again.

Sue returned grimly to the parlor and related to her father the events of the day. Captain Stocking was pacing the green carpet before she finished. He snorted at each turn, counted four steps up, five back, four up, five back. At the last word he stalked to the hall and twisted the crank of the telephone savagely.

"You, Josiah Parish?" Sue heard him cry. "Well, if you don't get down here quick and take this sarpent of a Baker home . . . sure, your man! Aye, your number seven man!"

He returned to the room, growling.

"Captain Stocking . . ." Baker spoke hoarsely from the couch.

"Pipe down!" Stocking ordered. "I got your capt'n out o' bed, by all the saints, and he's comin' down after you. I've been almighty slow, Ed Baker. I'm a peaceful man. I love peace, but I'm on to you now. I'd as soon be blind as have to look at you! Wasn't for my redemption I'd spoil you right now, do ye hear? I'd finish the job the boy started." He mopped his face. "Such language as you make me think!"

He padded across the floor and pushed open the uncurtained window. A lantern jiggled up the beach. To right and left its beam made juts and swings, as if

the man carrying it were following the delicate curves of the shore. Evidently the coast guard commander was running. Captain Stocking met him at the door.

Parish scowled as he strode in; his peaked face was hard as a carved figurehead.

"I don't like your talk over that telephone, Sam'l Stocking!" he began. "Nō call flingin' names at the coast guard!"

"Names, Josiah? I ain't started with names! Was I to say what I'm thinkin', Josiah, Ed Baker ain't fit to be in coast guard!"

"Ain't fit? He's my number seven man! Passed his examinations, ain't he? Gets rated proficient at every inspection. I want to know!"

"Shake out your tops'ls, Josiah!" Captain Stocking cooled his voice. "I'm aiming to tell you. I only ask, polite like, that you listen till I've finished."

"I'll tell him myself," Sue interrupted.

"All right, she'll tell you," her father agreed. "She's got a pretty story, Josiah. But how she can tell it without usin' language, I don't know."

Baker growled, shifted uneasily on the couch, and growled again.

"And that's all from you," Captain Stocking commanded. "How many times I got to tell you to moor that tongue o' yours?"

Sue talked rapidly, in a quiet voice, only once lifting her hands from her lap. That time she pointed at Baker. The keeper grumbled to himself now and then. Captain Parish walked the floor. His blady nose pulled down across his upper lip before she was half through, his eyebrows pinched into little brushy lumps like porcupines asleep. Once he exclaimed aloud. Ed Baker cried "Listen!" at the same moment, and then decided there was nothing more to say.

"Where's Erickson?" Parish asked.

"He's in bed, Captain," Sue answered. "Don't squall, you'll wake him."

"You was drinkin'?" Parish turned to Baker.

The latter nodded.

"Against regulations, Baker."

"Didn't take much."

"No man o' mine takes a drink on duty twice, Sam'l. Hear that, Baker?"

"Yes, sir."

"He hears it, Sam'l. And you hear this. Erickson pitched him overboard. Aye, that's what Miss Susan said. Well, tryin' to drown a man ain't my idee o' decent goings-on in this business. No yaller-bellied pumpkin seed of a light-keeper is goin' to drown my number seven man 'cause he's got a bit under his belt. And you stand for him, Sam'l Stocking? You better get rid of Erickson. . . ."

Captain Stocking stamped the floor.

"Don't say it, Josiah! Don't say it! I been holding my temper so tight for an hour that I'm nigh waterlogged! Go to bed, Sue. No, I'll talk, if you don't mind. This here Baker, he's a thief . . ."

"That's a lie!" Baker answered sourly.

"Spike your winch!" ordered Captain Stocking. "He's a thief, and I'll go provin' it before any judge you got a mind to ask down. And he insults my girl. And he goes after the boy with a scalin' knife like he was a trout. After my boy, I say, after Erickson. Him! Me get rid of Erickson? Here's a toad you'd best get rid of, Josiah, and quick at that! You keep him off my reservation, now on, and way off from this point. If you don't . . ."

"And if I don't, Sam'l Stocking, and if I don't? When's the light business started givin' orders to the coast guard?"

"Right now, Josiah! You keep him off my reserva-

tion, or I'll spoil him so's he don't make minnie bait! Haul away of him now, afore I gets started on language again, Josiah, haul away of him!"

Baker, cold sober, stood up. He glanced defiantly at Sue and her father, uncertainly at his commander.

"It's put up," he complained, "a put-up job. I'll tell you what, Captain Parish. My word's good as his every bit and good as a girl's. When it comes to that business about Delong, I see what happened to his papers. Erickson took 'em. I'll have them callin' me a thief, I will! And to-night a scalin' knife, they say. Let them prove it. Let them show you the knife!"

His voice lifted and gave him confidence.

"I'll tell you what happened to-night. I worked hard all day . . . you saw me, Capt'n. Come dark I went down to the dock, down to get a sleep. How'd I know it was Erickson's boat? He saw me there. Never waked me up. Out they started, with me shut up in the cabin. I know what they planned, I heard 'em. They schemed to dump me over, middle o' the lake, and nobody on shore the wiser. I fooled 'em! I fought 'em both! And Sue Stocking was throwin' lead sinkers!"

Parish nodded savagely. With great dignity he stalked to the corridor. Captain Stocking tipped his head and squinted after them. In the door, Parish turned about.

"No need wakin' me up in the middle of the night," he complained. "I'll be down in the morning, Sam'l, when you got your senses. Then we'll talk intelligent. Intelligent as a light-keeper can talk."

"Needn't come here, Josiah. I'll meet you up the beach. Half-way. Don't want no more life-savers 'round my reservation. Might snitch the lantern off'n the tower or something." He mopped his face.

"Good night, Sam'l," Parish said.

" 'Night, yourself," Stocking answered.

CHAPTER XXI

IF THE WIND BLOWS

Norman awakened Sunday morning with a fever. The second day of September poured its heat upon the coast, baking the sand as if it never had rained. Not a breeze stirred off the lake, not a squall annoyed the equanimity of its surface. The sky, clean swept of clouds, arched its blue back and drew apart from the earth. The sun cast orange lights and hard brown shadows and etched a narrow path, clean as a new-graded road, across the water. It sank unostentatiously behind the horizon, gilding the sky for only a moment. It arose in the morning with sultry and undeviating precision, without clouds, a flat, colorless, white-hot disk.

Three days, four, a week, Norman lay feverishly in his bed. Doctor McCarthy, summoned from across the dunes, looked at the patient critically and diagnosed over-exertion. He prescribed rest, and forbade absolutely any return to Madrid Bay for Gustaf Erickson's funeral.

In his cheerless room on the assistant keeper's side of the house, Norman stared at the ceiling and fought off delirium. His mind was clouded. Doubts, grief, misgivings, self-reproach and a miserable sense of futility clogged his thoughts. After all what did this struggle for a decent reputation avail if always in a critical moment some hideous, subconscious fear must crop out in his soul? Gustaf had done his part to redeem the name Erickson. Norman dreamed fitfully of

him. That he had died believing his son unfaithful to an honorable heritage was the core of every dream. He dreamed that he rescued his father once from a sinking vessel . . . it was Lem Hardy's mail boat, that burned her master two summers before . . . with Gustaf on his shoulders he swam miles and miles, until a little wave nipped at his feet and he let him drop back into water. Next day, and many times thereafter, his father rescued him; but always victoriously.

Again and again, awakening from deep, feverish sleep, he shrank from the touch of his red flannel blankets. Like fur they felt, like the wet matted wool of a drowned sheep. He dreamed a dozen times that he was a little boy fighting Eddie Baker in the dusty road above Madrid; he saw Ed chewing the tobacco he had stolen; it stuck to his teeth and he must keep on chewing it until he was an old, old man. He remembered something about a little girl named Julie, who liked to count gulls. Finally, he dreamed of that stormy day in June when his father cried: "Get out, there's too much Frenchie in you! Get out, and don't come back!"

Susan talked to him sternly in his rational half-hours. She ordered him to forget that brief spasm of fright in the flood of the Tamarack.

"You've proved yourself," she would say again and again. "Everybody knows it. Now go to sleep, Norman."

Deep in his own heart, Norman read another proof. He had been afraid. Like a coward he had fought the carcass of a drowned sheep. Like a coward he had run, here on the beach, from the body of Delong's dog. What if he *had* started out to rescue two men in the flood? What if the people around Madrid Bay did not consider him a coward any longer? He still was unproved to himself. The great test had not yet come,

the test on the wide tumbling waters of Lake Michigan in storm. What would he do then?

"Every man has a right to be afraid," James Delong had said, "it's how he acts that counts."

How would he, an Erickson, act? Would he feel the dead body of a wet dog upon his shoulders? Would he hear once more the awful accents of old Gustaf, telling again that story of the schooner *Gottland* and the captain's drowned wife and the captain's drowned dog? Or would he throw off those fears he had carried all these blustery seasons and prove himself, to his own rich satisfaction, a fit Erickson?

Doctor McCarthy returned to the lighthouse after two days. He found Norman with a clearer mind that morning, and tried to cheer him. His voice boomed good-humoredly through the bare quarters. He talked about the county fair to be held at Copperhead. When he departed, he left no medicine, to the disappointment of Sue, who held astounding faith in the healing power of certain herbs and ointments. It didn't take a doctor, or even a doctor book, to tell a man that he'd be rested if he stayed in bed.

"What'll I give him?" Susan demanded as McCarthy was starting across the dunes. He swung about, thoughtfully.

"Nothing."

"No pills . . . powders?"

"Nothing," he repeated. Then: "Talk to him, Miss Stocking, you're a good talker."

When he had gone, Susan returned to the kitchen and brewed boneset tea. She knew that it would break a fever. Hadn't she seen it work, a dozen times, up and down the coast? When she mentioned it to the doctor, he had laughed. She thought less of McCarthy's skill after that.

Fishing folk buried Gustaf Erickson Tuesday after-

noon in the little cemetery on the hills back of Madrid Bay. The women of the town, being creatures of coastwise habit, attended the funeral, but they watched afar off. They knew their place. What was their heritage, save to stand at the side and watch? All their lives they had watched men from a distance, watched husbands and sons carry on a wet, unending, often unrewarded tussle with the wide lake. If they looked back at the smoky hills, it was only to watch other men, men who struggled heartily in unfertile fields or in timber, fighting blight or weeds or fire. Even the somber simple ritual of death they viewed from afar. Only the daughter of Germaine Richaud walked near the hole in the sandy soil.

Julie, who stood close to James Delong, listened unhappily to the words that were read over Norman Erickson's father. It was different from the service to which she was accustomed. Her tears, when they fell, were for Norman's sake. The ceremony seemed barren to her; there were no flowers. When faithful Jim Nelson stepped forward at the end and put a handful of stones in the box with his shipmate's body, Julie exclaimed, unable to understand, and drew closer to James Delong.

Delong's face had become leaner in the few days, his lips were drawn tighter. He was taller than most of the abashed bearded men who listened to the missioner praise Gustaf Erickson and pray for his soul. Julie had recovered from her aversion to the lawyer. He was not so much of an outsider as he seemed at first. She even remonstrated with him when he blamed himself for the flood. He told her that his brother and he should have known better than to dam the river. But Fritz had employed an engineer to examine the dam, a man who claimed to be an expert. He reported that there was no danger.

Samuel Stocking, his blue uniform neatly pressed, his broad-toed shoes radiant with polish, stood in a group of fishermen on the other side of the open grave. He had left Susan in charge of the patient and the light, and cruised over in Norman's boat. Jim Nelson, who fretted beside him, wiped his pale eyes now and then; he had not had his way with the missioner about this burial. He had desired Gustaf's body to be taken out to the everlasting quiet of the sea. Gustaf would not rest easy on land in a wooden box.

Norman ate nothing all that day. He waited moodily for the keeper to come home, hoping for details. But Samuel Stocking did not believe in describing funerals. Norman decided not to question him; he would ask Julie later on; nor, after the first morning, did he mention Ed Baker to the keeper. Sue, refusing to discuss it, told him to forget it all; matters would right themselves.

Samuel Stocking and Captain Parish had a long talk on the sand that Sunday morning, with Baker eying them from the coast guard tower, and Sue watching covertly from a lighthouse window. They both shook their fists more than once, and kicked the sand stubbornly. Captain Stocking returned to the lighthouse in a bad mood.

"Was you ever tryin' to talk sense to a gas engine when they wasn't no sense in it?" he asked Sue. "That's Josiah Parish! There never was so much talk and so little brain in one hulk!"

"What does he say?"

"Nothing. Just talks. 'Baker's pop'lar here,' he tells me, 'pop'lar with the boys. He's explained his way of it, and they believes him.'

" 'Pop'lar?' says I. 'So's laziness!' "

The keeper walked twice about the dinner table, ridging his eyebrows. At length his hand went out in a

jab toward Norman's room, his fat thumb poking a question.

"Asleep," Sue answered.

"We come to an understanding, me and Josiah. Him and his keeps off my moorings and me and mine keeps off his. I'll put up a wire fence if needs be. I asks him if he wants me to go shield the light so it won't show in his sector. He gets powerful unreasonable when I asks that."

"I think I'll have to talk to him," Sue decided.

But she saw nothing of the coast guard commander or any of his men.

Captain Stocking walked over to Copperhead road the following Thursday, begged a ride and attended the funeral of Fritz Delong. He hunted out Julie and her father after the services, and told them that Susan insisted that they visit the lighthouse the next Sunday but one. Norman would be all right by then. Julie promised. The keeper had that much good news for his assistant.

"Nobody there at that funeral," he complained when he arrived home. "No folks, just a lot o' resorters. The parson, they brung him all the way up from Grand Haven . . . he talked like a dish of soup. Quiet. No real preachin'! I've knowed parsons! There was old Hell-bent Jamie in the mission at Cheboygan . . . that's a long time back. He could preach. He had a voice would of drowned out the fog signal."

James Delong accompanied Germaine Richaud and his daughter when they waded over the dunes to the light. He explained that he had met them on the road, had sent Peter back with their team and brought them himself in his car.

Fat old Germaine worked his short legs heavily through the last stretch of sand; when he arrived, he met Captain Stocking with a surly air. He had no de-

sire to visit a lighthouse; he was prepared in his heart to dislike it. When Julie bade him come he had found a dozen objections and finally put it up to Madame Richaud. She had supported Julie surprisingly. Germaine yielded. But what had come over the women? There was work to be done at home, the good God knew, Sunday or no Sunday . . . how else except by work could they get back all the money out of which the wicked river had cheated them?

And he still distrusted James Delong; not so much as he had, but enough. He hung to his reins stubbornly when Delong, slowing his car in the road, suggested that they might ride along faster with him. He gave them up ill-humoredly and for only one reason: the Grand Haven lawyer had abandoned the white duck trousers that Germaine despised, and was clad decently in black.

"What do you do with the devilish hole now?" Germaine asked insultingly.

"The little lake?" Delong's big face darkened. "I'm going to clean out the bottom and sod it down, Mr. Richaud."

Germaine smacked his lips.

"It would make an elegant gravel pit. That gravel you sell to the county roads. Thirty cents a yard they give!"

"I'll sod it," Delong repeated, and set his lips as if he had made his mind some time before.

Susan had walked up the beach to meet them. From the lantern deck on the tower she had seen the big car slow down before it reached the deep sand and its passengers alight. She came upon Norman at the kitchen door. He wore his uniform, wore it extremely well, she thought. But his face was thin. His eyes still were too bright from fever.

Sue's short hair blew out impudently in the gentle

wind as she walked north and east along the shore. Norman saw her turn into the dunes. He waited impatiently at the tower door. He had not seen Julie since the evening of the flood; two weeks it had been. She had seemed close to him then. Her impulses under the stress of that day's excitement certainly had smacked of something besides the hills. Julie was always faithful to him. She was like Jim Nelson in that; he believed she would consent now to anything he asked her to do.

He met them on the sand back of the lighthouse. He saw Steve Sutton come out of his shack when the group passed, and stare after them up the beach. Norman hoped that Sutton would have sense enough to stay away this afternoon. His fishy presence would turn any self-respecting inland girl against the lake.

Captain Stocking dropped asleep in his chair soon after the guests arrived; his daughter and James Delong retired to the fishcord hammock. Norman felt light of heart as he showed Julie and her father about the resplendent and orderly reservation. It was hot in the lantern, with the afternoon sun flinging its rays ambitiously against the plate-glass sides. Germaine sat down five times to rest while climbing the ninety-one steps. Norman's own legs ached. Only Julie ran up comfortably. Her "oh's" and "ah's" delighted him.

"I like it!" she cried. "Oh, not to live here, but to see once. It's so clean!" She touched the white paint with a round middle finger. "Do you scrub all the time, Norman?"

Norman laughed. "Most of the time," he admitted.

"I don't like white paint," Germaine growled. "It gets too dirty. Me . . . when I build my new barn, I paint him red." Mention of the barn made the old man remember the flood. He groaned. "How much longer do you stay here, Norman?" he asked. "When are you coming back to land?"

"This is land," Norman answered.

"This? *Non!* This is no more land than my wet sheep pasture. I never trust that pasture again. When are you coming back to land?"

"I don't know," Norman answered vaguely. He raised his blue eyes to Julie's black ones. "It depends on a good many things. Perhaps I'll not come back . . . ever."

He waited expectantly for Julie's answer to that; it was in accord with him.

"I think it is very nice." She stared out gravely across the lake. "Very nice, Norman. I did not expect to like it at all. But I do. The water is so blue, and your sun is so yellow, yellower than the sun on land. But at night . . ." she shivered. "Is it very wet at night, Norman?"

"Nights aren't so bad. No wetter than day."

"But if the wind blows? Then I wouldn't like it."

Norman eyed her face suspiciously. There was a familiar taunt in what she said and he flushed under it. He remembered that afternoon, long before, the day his father ordered him into the fishing fleet, the day Gustaf tried to rescue Lem Hardy and was smashed to pieces doing it. He sat with Julie on the Richaud steps that afternoon and confessed that he was afraid of storms. Real storms. And she had laughed at him. She had warned him never to tell any one else. He changed the subject quickly.

"This is the lens," he explained to Germaine, "these pieces of glass. They throw the light so vessels can see it at night."

"How far?"

"Sixteen miles."

Germaine whistled. His daughter touched the glass admiringly; when she saw Norman start she drew back her hand swiftly.

"I see," she exclaimed ruefully, "I must not touch it. It will make it spotty."

"It is worth ten thousand dollars."

"Ten t'ousan' what?" Germaine demanded.

"Dollars. It was made by the Germans."

"Germans? Sacred saints! Ten t'ousan' dollars to the Germans? Twenty t'ousan' bushel of potatoes, just to make light? Too much!"

"Too much?" Norman felt himself growing angry. "Nothing is too much for Blind Man's Eye. You can't understand back there in the hills. This is a sign-post, Germaine. This light shines every night as a warning to skippers. It keeps them off the rocks, it shows them the channels, it saves good ships."

"I understand," Julie said.

Her father grumbled.

"Your foolish little head understands t'ings too quick," he muttered, "but that keeps none of this sand out of my boots."

Germaine refused to move farther after they descended to the tower door. Norman did not urge him whole-heartedly. He perceived that Julie subscribed just as willingly as he to her father's desire to remain behind. Again he felt sure . . . sure in his impassioned heart that Julie would consent to anything he asked. It was she who chose their path. She ran impulsively down the line of wet rocks that swung in a narrow finger off the tip of the point, out toward the submerged stone ledge of Blind Man's Teeth. She waited for Norman then, submitted to being led down to the beach and along the boulders that reared above the lake.

The water closed in on two sides of them. Only the rocks beneath their feet formed a narrow tricky bridge to bind them to the unimaginative land. Julie was more talkative then ever after they left her father. She

related a half-dozen foolish incidents of the week on the farm; none of them remotely connected with the disaster. But her mood changed, once the beach was left behind. She gave up the laughter that had burst from her throat all day; her black eyes lost their purple glow, her lips grew thinner and not so full of color.

Young waves leaped over the edges of the stones, singing to these two with joyous melodies, chuckling as if they had just learned the secret of eternal life from an indulgent mother lake, and wished now to share it with them. Norman felt the warm pliability of Julie's hand as he guided her expertly across a narrow channel. He held her a moment in his arms when she slipped on a wet rock. She gave no heed to his intensity. Only her fingers, when they touched his by chance, were hot, and set his own to tingling. They came at last to a heap of stones where the water shelved off deeply; there they sat down, facing the broad horizon. They did not speak at first. It was as if the immensity of the distance commanded silence, as if it forbade speech. They forgot Germaine, they forgot Samuel Stocking and Susan and Delong. They forgot Blind Man's Eye. They forgot the land, and its commonplace severity. They were detached from it. Before their eyes, in a thin magnetic line upon the distant edge of the lake, lay the end of the world.

Julie's silence became infectious. How long they had sat thus neither one of them knew. And then Norman heard a sound that he mistook at first for laughter. When he turned, he discovered tears upon Julie's cheeks.

"Why, Julie!"

"I'm sorry, Norman. But it makes me cry . . . all this . . ."

She waved her hand despairingly at the horizon, at the jubilant waters beneath her feet. She glanced up

at the round sky. Her gaze became fixed upon its emptiness, and Norman, unable to understand, grew troubled. The lake could make one love it or hate it, whichever it chose. It could frighten one into horrible nightmares. It could make women cry sometimes when the wind was in the north and men failed to return to port; but never on a fair day like this.

"It is too big for one girl!" she explained, and wiped her cheeks. She added impetuously: "It is very splendid, I begin to see . . . I *do* see why your father loved it."

Norman, accepting her mood, tried to reason it out for himself. Julie was a shy person. Perhaps she felt ill at ease here, uncomfortable away from her own hills. He had seen his mother look thus, as if earth had abandoned her on the door-step of the sea. She never had been happy by the water. Would Julie? If she were sad, he would be sad too.

"I don't know whether it is splendid or not, Julie," he said hesitantly. "I don't know whether I love it or hate it. Often I tell myself that I love it and then I find that I don't. Once in a while I hate it . . . not often now. . . ."

"You must not!"

"But if I do? Perhaps I am like my mother, Julie. She didn't wish to live by the water. She wanted my father to farm. I could farm, Julie." The words burned in his mouth.

"Farm?" she spoke incredulously.

"Is Henri Plamondon's forty still vacant?"

"Norman Erickson!" She stood on the rocks, struggling for balance. "You must not think of that!"

"You urged it once, Julie. You don't like all this or why would you cry? You sit here close enough to the lake to talk to it for the first time in your life and it makes you unhappy. You can not help it. I know that.

But I don't need to stay here. I can quit. I'll farm."

"I know I wanted you to farm. I was wrong."

"But I can't ask you to live by the water. Not since you have cried. I was going to, Julie, here, now, out on these rocks. I was going to ask you if you'd ever love me enough to live here at the light. . . ."

"You must not ask me! I can answer without that. No, Norman. This is not for me. I am from the land, and back to the land I go. It is in me, sand and trees and hills. It is in my blood. I can not help it."

"You do not love me!"

"I go back where I belong, Norman."

"Then I go, too!"

"No. You can not. There is wind in *your* blood. Wind and the broad waters. Here is your home, here by the shore. It is not for us to talk about. It was decided for us."

"It was not! I don't believe it!" His voice faltered; he knew in his heart that for him at least it had been decided. "I can make you happy on Plamondon's farm!"

"Don't, Norman. I would not be happy anywhere, if I knew you were not where you belong. I can see farther than you. All women can. You were born with the wind in your blood. *Oui,* you fought it. You tried to quiet it in you. But it is there. Your father put it there. It is stronger than anything your mother bequeathed to you. You think sometimes you hate it? You do not. I can see it in your eyes to-day. I can see this lake, it comes into your heart. I can see it take you and make you its slave, Norman. Who am I to interfere, when the lake and a man with wind in his veins are together? You are not a coward. I know it, every one else except you knows it. You must prove it to yourself. You belong here. . . ."

She did not take time to brush away the tears that

were staining her cheeks. He opened his mouth to argue. No words were suitable.

"It is decided," Julie said firmly, "I go and you stay. I will not cry . . . no, I will not!"

She turned her back to him and peered intently at the vast distance. One minute, two, she gazed, and then deliberately she faced the shore.

"There are girls meant for the lake," she said, "I am not one of them. Sue Stocking is. She is born to live by water. So are you, Norman."

"No, no, Julie!"

"But yes." Finality put a stiff edge to her voice. "She is a fine girl, Norman. She will make you a good wife. I have my own future . . . it is not with you . . . no, no!"

Before he could speak again, before he could reach out his hand, she had gone. She was running over the rocks, fleeing from the water and from him. He plunged after her. She hesitated once, then sped on determinedly and flung herself up the beach. At the top of a sandy hummock she halted, her heels biting firmly into the dry security of earth.

"Julie!" Norman cried out. "Julie, you are wrong!"

She had merely stopped for breath. She ran on at once and did not look back. Norman raced after her. He had been too sure! He had thought she would do anything he asked now! He had said she was faithful. Was she right? Must she stay by the soil and he with the wind and the lake?

"No, no, Julie," he called, "you are wrong!"

She reached the lighthouse ahead of him. Germaine grumbled as Norman caught up with them.

"Do you sit on the hard rocks forever?" he asked. "Come, it is time to do chores, time we start home."

Julie agreed. She was quite herself. She made her

farewells with dignity, choosing to ignore, so far as Norman was concerned, anything that had passed between them. Only her hand, when she gave it to him, he found restless and hot.

"Will you come back next Sunday?" he asked. The question seemed hopeless. She surprised him with her answer.

"Why, perhaps," she said, and added: "It's an interesting place to visit."

"Come to dinner," Sue suggested, "and you, Mr. Delong."

Captain Stocking, waking from his nap, heard his daughter's invitation.

"Not next Sunday," he forbade, "I don't want company next Sunday."

"Why not?" demanded Sue.

"You ask that, and you a sailor's daughter? Know you what date next Sunday is?"

"The twenty-third."

"Aye, and the twenty-third's a good day to keep your eyes open around water. Don't want any landlubbers about my light that day. It'll storm. Twenty-third o' September's the equinox."

"Father, that's superstition."

"Superstition?" The keeper bulged his eyebrows indignantly. "Mebbe Christmas is superstition. Or the Fourth of July. I hate that word. Whenever a parcel o' schoolmarms that's never been nearer any real happenings than a book," he paused for breath, "I say whenever a parcel of schoolmarms don't want to believe something that's plain as Noah's nose, they call it superstition. Bah!"

James Delong turned from an absent-minded stare across the water. His face was sober as it had been all day.

"It does sometimes storm on the equinox," he

argued, "but so it does on other days. There's no scientific fact . . ."

"And you a yachter! Ho! The twenty-third o' September's the equinox. That settles that. Blow? Why, Jonah got blowed out o' the whale on that day . . . on the twenty-third o' September! It never missed. Except once or twice," he added solemnly.

Sue laughed.

"You'll come anyway?" she asked her guests.

"It'll have to blow mighty hard to keep *me* away," Delong answered.

"She'll blow!" the keeper answered.

CHAPTER XXII

GULLS BY NIGHT

In the seamanly opinion of Captain Stocking, to prepare ashore for a storm meant to polish with painstaking care every piece of brass on the lighthouse reservation.

All Monday he kept Norman on his knees, using flannel and powder until the fixtures that he rubbed reflected the nose on his face in a blaze of brightness. The keeper tested with his own hands every conceivable bolt and oil cup about the fog signal. His short little clay pipe blew ambitious clouds of smoke as he stalked here, there and back again, examining everything in sight and out. Often, in passing, he stopped to relate a dark unwholesome experience with the equinoxial gale. He ended each anecdote with the same hearty assertion; so far as Samuel Stocking was concerned Blind Man's Eye should go to meet its Maker shipshape.

The first day's preparations were completed and Norman was up to his elbows in soapsuds when Steve Sutton arrived in his wheezy boat at five o'clock, bringing a fish for the keeper's supper. He had been seen rarely at the light since the shipwreck of James Delong. But he had been hauling nets off Madrid over the week-end and returned with a brave tale of a remarkable catch of fish. From the post-office in Madrid he brought a letter to Norman who retired to the skiff to examine it.

With something like rage but more like paralysis he let the sheet drop into the bottom of the boat after he

had read it twice. He rescued it glumly. Bilge water had dampened its corners a little. He wiped them on his sleeve and went into the house. Should he show it to the keeper or not? He should not, he decided. Nor to Sue. What was the use? They had told him often enough that he didn't belong here at Blind Man's Eye!

He buried the missive in a drawer full of shirts. Letters were infrequent here at the light and therefore well worth saving. This one was brief and printed in type as black as the boiler coal. It instructed Norman Erickson, assistant keeper of the lighthouse at Blind Man's Reef to present himself at district depot on October first for reexamination as to his fitness of character. Reports of conduct unbecoming the service could be ignored no longer. It was signed by Cat-eye McGoogan.

Norman washed his face three times after he had read it; cold water failed to make him feel any better.

"Trouble!" he whispered at the mirror. "Don't it take the bacon! Here I am, just getting my compass set straight . . ." he stopped savagely and flung the towel to the floor. "What's the use? What's the use?" he repeated.

He stooped and picked up the towel. He was about to take out the letter for another reading when Captain Stocking's voice sounded from the parlor.

"Heaven save me this time!" he was screaming. "By hoky poky, I've a mind to give up my chance of redemption!"

Norman hurried across the hall. The keeper stood in the middle of the floor, feet spread out, fat hands clasping his round head. He was staring at Sutton, who stared back inoffensively. The fisherman held a great piece of cake in his hand; he was chewing rapidly.

"Sue gave it to me," he protested, "she tells me I can have it. I asks for it polite-like. . . ."

"What's that got to do with what I'm saying?" the

captain howled. "Did she tell you to come draggin' it into the parlor? Tell you to go splashin' crumbs all over the deck?"

Norman glanced at the floor. Crumbs of cake soiled the green carpet at Sutton's feet.

"It's once too often, Mr. Sutton, and that's the end!" the keeper screamed. "I've stood all and more'n a Christian ought to, out o' you! And why? 'Cause you're a neighbor! 'Love your neighbors,' says the good Book. Why else you think I let you snoop aroun' here where you don't belong and where you ain't wanted no more'n measles?"

Sutton looked ruefully from the keeper to the offending crumbs.

"I ain't done nothing," he protested.

"Ain't done nothing? Listen at him! I can tell you what you've done. Who hit that dog-fish Baker on the head in the dark and let my boy Norman catch the blame? Don't say you didn't, don't say it! I'll spill my redemption all over the shore, I will, Sutton, another minute. Think we don't know who hit Baker that night? Think I don't look at tracks in the sand? Think I don't see where your skiff come ashore and you clumb out o' it with a crack in your rubber boot bigger'n Robinson Crusoe?"

He sputtered, caught his glasses as they slid off his nose and waltzed nearer the fisherman. Sutton stepped backward, still chewing cake.

"And then you go tellin' lies! Untruthful lies about Erickson! And actin' like a sarpent about my friend Delong. Who was it but you sees the *Kitty K.* first that night? And took me out in a skiff with rotten oars? It ain't much of a man lets his oars get rotten! I've stood almighty much, Sutton, I have! But when you come spillin' crumbs on my green carpet, by hoky poky . . ."

He clenched his fists. Sutton sidled around the table toward the hall door.

"Out with ye!" Stocking bellowed. "Out my house, or by Skillagallee I'll spoil you so's the gulls won't have you! I'm sicker o' you than the whale was o' Jonah, and what the whale did ain't half! My, oh, my, there goes my redemption! I'll . . ."

He pursued the visitor through the open door. Sutton had finished his cake. He was leaving the reservation hurriedly at a long-legged gallop. Captain Stocking halted upon the step, waving a round red fist after him. He came back into the room and began picking up crumbs.

"A poor sort o' sarpent for a good man to go riskin' salvation over," he grumbled. "Now supper. There's a fish to cook, Sue. Sure I'll eat it. Him ketching it don't make it poison, does it?"

Norman ate his meal silently. It was like Captain Stocking to go to pieces over a little thing . . . crumbs on the parlor carpet . . . after all the graver offenses that Sutton had committed.

"Do you think Steve will ever come back?" Sue asked.

"Back here? Aboard my light? Well, I hope I've got to heaven 'fore he tries it. More bread, Sue. And jam. I been waitin' a long spell for something worth quarrelin' about with that sarpent!" He pushed back his empty pudding dish. "Time to light up," he remarked briskly.

Norman, left alone with Sue, thought again of the letter. "Reports of conduct unbecoming the service!" He refused pudding gruffly when she offered it a second time. Should he tell her, or not? He decided to wait. But all the rest of the week, while he worked with grimy face and hands about the fog signal, two visions remained constantly before his eyes. They were the

black print of Cat-eye McGoogan's letter and Julie Richaud's handsome flushed face when she said: "You must not ask me!" He had been too sure of Julie.

Friday night the wind shifted. The keeper listened to it gloomily while he rocked in his sway-backed chair, his shoes standing ready on the floor beside him, wool stockings on his feet, his pipe gone out. It was bad, an evening wind like that. But it fell right in with his week's predictions. Every day he had been telling them. And nobody listened. Neither his daughter nor his assistant. This was Friday . . . bad enough in itself . . . and Sunday would be the twenty-third. If fate were kind she would bring a storm fit to break the hinges of hell on Sunday, just to substantiate an old man's convictions. After all, wasn't he their elder?

And they called the equinoxial gale superstition. Sue did, at least, and that yachter Delong. Erickson had a little bit more sense . . . he believed Erickson was inclined to agree with him.

The keeper put on his shoes, conscious of his aging back. His binoculars did not hang where he had left them.

"Sue!" he called angrily.

She came quickly, a red sweater about her shoulders, its empty sleeves tied around her neck. She had been sitting in the swing with Norman.

"Sue, where's my binoculars?"

"Right there." She pointed toward his chair back.

"Wasn't there a minute ago," he grunted.

He swung them to his shoulder by their leather strap and stepped out into the darkness. The day had been sultry. Its sun had shone half-heartedly through an insipid mist, a round white blot upon the grayness of the heavens, an unornamental reflection upon the waveless surface of the lake. The wind had been out of the southwest, such little oily wind as blew. All afternoon

it touched the land with warm sticky fingers, shaking ever so slightly the leaves of the birch trees back of the dunes, in weary singsong cadence swaying the tops of old hemlocks upon the higher ridges.

Now, after sundown, it swung into the north abruptly, cooled, strengthened, became vigorous and argumentative. The slow swell of late afternoon was broken into curt jabby waves out beyond Blind Man's Teeth. The last of the mist had fled the sky; immediately, even before the afterglow paled in the west, pert stars leaped into their places. Night fell swiftly, clear as a hard-blown lake wind.

Captain Stocking walked for ten minutes up and down the beach. Then he called sharply:

"Hi, Norman! Sue! Come here a minute!"

They ran down to the wash. Small waves already were kicking at the sand. Above, in the clear night, the lamp atop Blind Man's Eye sang its gentle soothing lullaby. The wind crackled through beach grasses. Far on the north horizon a long freighter, with its two bunches of lights at bow and stern, stood out impudently against the obscurity of distance. The stars hung low in the rounded sky.

"Listen!" Captain Stocking bade.

Norman tried and failed to pick up any curious sound.

"Gulls?" he asked at length. "Gulls out in the Teeth?"

"Gulls it is!" Captain Stocking agreed.

Norman, lighting his pipe, saw the keeper's round bright eyes watching him feverishly.

"What you make o' that?" the older man asked.

"Make?"

Norman hesitated. What should be make? Why make anything? The gulls were friendly little gluttons. He used to feed them out of his hand afternoons

when he scrubbed the fish shanty; as he watched them gobble up the cleanings he felt for a certainty that birds came to know one. They were company if a man felt lonely. Even Gustaf had liked the gulls; he never seemed to notice what scared eyes they all had.

"I don't make anything, Captain."

"Don't make anything o' gulls by night? Don't know anything about 'em then, Erickson. Well, mebbe you ain't supposed to, never having signed on deep water. But those gulls, they got a power of sense."

Sue stirred restlessly.

"I'm going up to the house, father. It's cold here."

"Wait a minute. Hear that?"

From the rocks of the Teeth the birds cried uneasily.

"Hungry," Norman said, "they're always hungry. They want food."

"At night? Oh, no. They're mournin', Erickson. Mournin' a drown-ding. A drown-ding that ain't happened yet. That's how wise them gulls are. When a blow's making, think they don't know it? Equinox comes day after to-morrow. Why we hear gulls squalling Friday night in the dark if it ain't goin' to rip the robe off'n Elijah? Some say them gulls was all good seamen in their time."

"That's quite as foolish as the story of the *Kitty K.*," Sue commented indignantly. She started toward the house.

"Think so, eh?" Her father bridled. "Believe it or let it go, folks as has sailed a proper amount believe it. Foolish, eh?"

Norman pocketed the tale in that portion of his mind reserved for old Stocking's peculiarities. The keeper was fidgety. A brave little man, Norman reflected, afraid of nothing under heaven, first in his boots if anybody called, and yet stuffed full of more superstitions

than a Frenchie. It was queer he'd believe such yarns. James Delong would explain it by psychology; explain the keeper the same way he did the assistant. Norman remembered many things uncomfortably. To be sure old Sam'l was a better man than he ever hoped to be!

He rowed out in his father's skiff to the gasoline boat, floating in deep water to the landward of Blind Man's Teeth. He had made a cable fast to the anchor of an old schooner, broken up and sunk there twenty years before. With her hatches closed and battened and deep enough water under her, Gustaf's boat would weather nearly any gale. He poked about her deck, pumped her out, and let the waves push his skiff ashore.

"Wind's lifting," he reported as he passed into his room, "it'll be kicking up quite a bit by morning."

"Them gulls . . ." Samuel Stocking answered portentously.

Norman slept soundly in spite of the clamor of a rising gale. Captain Stocking shook him at one o'clock.

"Your watch on deck," he called, yawning, "she's still blowing!"

Norman realized as he pawed out of bed that the house had become surprisingly cold. Chill drafts, swaying the curtains at the windows, blew across the floor and struck his feet. Wind cleared his mind of sleep when he was dressed and out in the air. Straight down from the north the rising storm pounded with blunt hammering blows. Already the grind of breakers sounded on Blind Man's Teeth. He climbed to the top of the tower, made his inspection cautiously, and ran back down the stairs, turning up his coat collar.

A lantern moved rapidly a hundred yards up the beach from the direction of the coast guard station. One o'clock in the morning, sky clear, not a vessel in sight off shore . . . there was no apparent cause

for any one running. Norman waited, disturbed by curiosity.

It was not a patrol. The fat man who panted up to the lighthouse proved to be Doctor McCarthy of Copperhead. He carried an emergency case in one hand, his pudgy black bag in the other.

"Hello, there," he shouted, "hello, Erickson. Thought I'd find one of you fellows up."

Norman answered in an undertone. He had learned a habit of quiet around the lighthouse on the night watch. Doctor McCarthy put his satchel on the beach and wiped his neck under his collar with a crooked finger. He sighed expressively.

"I'm too fat to run, die in a heart attack some night. The old man here?"

Norman assented.

"He's asleep. Just gone to bed."

"Wake him," bade McCarthy.

"Now? Two bells? Hate to, Doctor."

"Got to," said McCarthy.

Norman looked at him inquiringly, then led him into the house and struck a match to the parlor lamp. McCarthy's face was not so calm under the light as his voice had indicated. His eyes shone angrily.

"Snap to it, young man," he ordered.

Norman rapped softly on the keeper's door. A snore answered him, then Captain Stocking grumbled:

"Aye."

He descended to the parlor at once, gulping hard and wearing his breeches, one boot and a blanket.

"Well?" he asked.

McCarthy turned from the window. He had unbuttoned his collar and its ends poked out under his chin. He still breathed with difficulty.

"Got a boat?" he demanded.

"What for?"

"To ride in, Stocking! To go to Battle Ax Island. There's been an explosion of some kind over there this evening. Gasoline, I figure. Postmaster got the call to me on the submarine telephone. A couple of hours ago it happened. Three children burned, woman and three children. I've got to go."

"Get the coast guard," Captain Stocking suggested.

"Drown the coast guard!" retorted McCarthy. "That's just what I mean, Stocking. Drown 'em! Suppose they'd stir off the beach? Say they can't do it regular or legal or something. I told 'em. Told 'em to Borneo with regulations!"

"Tut, tut, McCarthy!"

The keeper walked to the window, limping in his one boot, and gazed out thoughtfully.

"Wind's risin' still. It *is* ag'in' regulations for the coast guard, McCarthy. Government puts it up to the keeper. If he goes and a call for his boat comes in from some distress while he's gone, he's responsible."

"That's an excuse. I told 'em it was children hurt. Told 'em I'd get you. . . ."

Captain Stocking clucked his tongue.

"What'd Josiah say to that?"

"Said nobody down here had a boat or guts enough to run it if he had."

"Josiah said that?"

"There's my father's boat," Norman cut in.

His voice faltered. Suppose he could do it? Why not? Captain Stocking regarded him reflectively.

"Josiah won't go," he repeated. "Got enough gas, Norman?"

"Think so, sir. I'm ready, Doctor."

"Better start then. Be a mite careful," said the keeper.

Stocking held out his hand. Norman grabbed slicker and sou'wester from the corridor wall. The doctor

helped heave the skiff down the sand. Climbing into it, he stopped and put his hand to his ear.

"What'd you say?" he asked Norman.

"Nothing," the assistant keeper answered.

What he had said, fiercely under his breath in a stringent, close-lipped exultation, was "Scart? Me? My name's Erickson, isn't it? Coast guard won't go? We don't need them!"

Captain Stocking waved his blanket in farewell as they pushed off. Standing one-legged on the beach, his bare foot wet, he watched the skiff bounce through the sliding breakers until it became an indistinct patch on the water. He saw the port-side light on Gustaf Erickson's gas boat blaze red, heard the chug of its engine as Norman heaved over the flywheel. Once more the red lamp flashed. Then the lake folded her black cloak about the boat and he gave up watching.

Only the stars were visible, leaning close overhead, and the undeviating beam of Blind Man's Eye. Listening sharply through the howl of wind and water, the keeper heard the ominous cry of birds above Blind Man's Teeth, the eerie wailing of gulls, that his deep-sea convictions told him were the reincarnated souls of drowned sailing men. Their voices mingled with the contemptuous hoot of new winds and the thrash of rising waters in a vast portentous monotone. Returning to the house, Captain Stocking looked at his watch.

It was Saturday morning at two o'clock. To-morrow brought the equinox.

CHAPTER XXIII

GUSTAF'S BOAT

CAPTAIN STOCKING'S equinoxial gale ripped a day early across the five wide inland seas. It piled tall thrashing breakers atop the harbor cribs at Chicago and Ashtabula and Buffalo, charged up the Straits of Mackinac with an exultant fury, splashed the pictured rocks of Superior with fine steely spindrift and roared a chesty threat above the thirty thousand cringing islets of Georgian Bay.

Lake Michigan heard the coming of its lash all Friday night. With the gray of dawn, the wind settled into a tense unyielding vehemence, taut as a drawn wire. The rollers charged in solid platoons along the deeper spaces, died in ecstasy on Blind Man's Teeth, flung taunting spray across the sand and into the trees at the edge of the indurate dunes.

Norman had steered with a skilful rudder since two o'clock. Under the rocky head of Battle Ax Island, with its stone light tower, he pulled open the trap to the cabin. A morning light showed faintly in the east; the lake was heaving with a long swell. Far overhead, higher than the ridges of the island, the wind rushed, shouting.

"All right?" Norman cried.

Doctor McCarthy showed a sick white face.

"My Lord, are we ever going to get there?" He tried to rise from the cabin floor.

"We're there now," Norman answered. "We can anchor and go ashore soon as some one sees us and sends

out a skiff. Or we can wait for a little more daylight and find the dock ourselves."

"I'm sick," the physician confessed, "terribly sick."

"You'll get over it," Norman promised, and wondered why McCarthy groaned.

They went ashore at dawn from the lighthouse dock. Up the beach the surfman on watch at Battle Ax coast guard station thrust his head out of the tower window and stared unbelievingly. The light-keeper, a young man with a chapped red nose and a cold in his head, questioned them admiringly.

"And maybe *your* boat could of made it. But they's not many. Must be a staunch 'un. It's the Corrigans that's hurt. One boy died in the night. Best stop in and rest a minute. I'll call up the town . . . it's a two-mile walk ag'in' the wind. There's coffee on the stove."

"Thanks," the doctor answered, "which way? They'll give me coffee. You stay here and dry off, Erickson. It's kind of a pull on a man's heart, facing it outside the way you did."

Norman slept three hours behind the stove in the Battle Ax light kitchen. The keeper brought him soup at noon. Norman drank it silently, stretched out and slept again. At two o'clock McCarthy tramped in. He had lost his cap in the wind.

"Sorry to be so long," he said.

"Just in time," Norman answered, "wind's rising. But we ought to make it, still."

McCarthy looked disturbed.

"I can't go back right now," he confessed, "one kid did check in. But I'm going to save the others! I thought if you wanted to go home now and run back to-morrow after me . . ."

Norman understood why the light-keeper grinned.

"Nobody will run anywhere to-morrow, except for

shelter," he told McCarthy. "Think we could start early this evening?"

"If these people don't need me."

"I'll wait," Norman decided.

Night struck at four o'clock, like the blow of a black iron hammer. Enheartened winds shrieked with one tuneless voice. Norman struggled down to the dock at seven, where Gustaf's boat sawed her long bow line against the planks. He kindled the sidelights, to be ready whenever McCarthy came. Let a bit of storm scare him? He laughed there in the gusty blackness and wondered why he was laughing.

It was an hour past midnight when he awakened again in the lighthouse kitchen; Doctor McCarthy had panted into the room.

"All set?" he asked.

Outside, the hooting winds answered. Norman heard them with disquietude. The doctor, observing his expression, went to the window and stared out.

"I'll have to borrow a hat," he commented; he found a handkerchief in his pocket and wiped sweat from his fat neck. "Sorry I was so long, Erickson. Nasty job I had with that woman. Even now she'll need a new face. Awful to see children hurt that way. I'd take 'em over to the mainland to the hospital if it weren't for this storm. . . ." He waved toward the window.

"Nobody takes off to-night," the keeper said.

"Nobody? I have to go back. I called my home up at the coast guard, on the submarine phone. I've another emergency case waiting over there."

The keeper blew his nose raucously.

"You can't go in this!" He laughed at the doctor's ignorance. "Nothin' the size o' that tub out there could keep afloat. Blow's making harder every minute." He handed McCarthy some coffee. "Ain't any milk."

McCarthy drank it in three swallows and pushing back the cup, looked across inquiringly at Norman.

"What about it?" he asked.

"I've gas enough," Gustaf Erickson's son answered.

"How do you feel?"

"Good. Kind of stiff. But I'm ready."

The keeper became angry. "I won't leave you!" he cried. "I'll leave no man go drown off my point!"

"We won't drown," the doctor assured him, "Erickson's a seaman."

A seaman! Norman buckled on his sou'wester and slicker and stepped out to the blasty beach. The wind had shifted farther to the north while he slept. It beat the air in fisty gusts, pounding against his face; it wailed in a thousand ribald voices overhead; below, the weary lake wrestled in impotent exertion, wave against wave.

"You're crazy!" the light-keeper screamed.

The doctor ran after Norman. He had buttoned his overcoat to his throat; on his head perched a borrowed sou'wester, three sizes too small. His cigarette burst like an exploding shell in the wind, and a long string of flaming particles shot out across the dock.

"I'll stand outside with you this time," he shouted.

Norman handed him a small line and motioned to cleats on the decking.

"Make yourself fast," he commanded.

The mooring lines were cast off from the dock. Norman turned over the flywheel of the engine, scampered back to the deck, clamped shut the cabin hatch, jammed his feet firmly astride the tiller and took his bearings.

Battle Ax light revolved astern, a quick flashing spark, portentous, blood red, hidden now by rollers high as a house, now clear, now dimmed in the mist of spray squalls. Far ahead, indistinct, concealed for periods, shone the fixed white lantern of Blind Man's Eye.

Gustaf's boat spun, burrowed under, mounted high unexpectedly, shook herself like a mettlesome horse, slid astern off the hunched backs of rollers. Up hills and down into valleys she plunged doggedly keeping at her duty. An hour they worked southeast. Then Norman's ear bent toward the cabin. His planted feet measured the thud of the engine.

"She's missing," he cried to McCarthy, "engine's missing!"

He lifted the trap in the cabin roof, dragged the doctor after him and jammed the hatch cover back on. At that moment the engine sputtered and stopped. The boat, with mischievous antics, thrashed across the seas. Unguided, she flung through the night, bounding light as a net float from the top of one giant roller to the top of the next. Or turning sullen, she buried herself so deep that the planks creaked all together from the pressure. Ribs bent and threatened to let go. Water booted down atop the decks. She dived, her blunt, unlovely bow burrowing closer and closer to bottom.

And with no reason, for no apparent cause, she leaped up each time and rode free. Down in the cabin, McCarthy of Copperhead sprawled on the deck boards, holding with fingers that ached and bled. A careening fish box jammed into his side before he had his bearings. It released him for half a breath and with a new pitch of the boat, pursued him about the cabin.

Had the night on deck been dark, here below the blackness was solid. Norman braced his feet and knees and flung over the flywheel. The motor gave a small gasp the first time and stopped, unreasonable as death.

"It's the spark!" he screamed toward McCarthy. "Those wires! They're loose somewhere. Give me a hand? A hand, I say!"

McCarthy's head brought up with a thud against the engine block, and the doctor collapsed.

"You, Doc!" Norman howled. "Where you at?"

He found his passenger in the corner. McCarthy did not respond to shaking.

"No time for him now," Norman muttered.

He sought the tool box. Rummaging in the heaving dark, he found the flash lamp which Delong had given to him. He poured its beam on the engine. The two black cylinders sat as impassive as hooded nuns side by side on the block. Norman gripped a pipe and leaned across the engine, the flash in one hand.

The boat thrashed his head against the roof . . . once, twice . . . it would break from his shoulders with such wracking as that. The wiring hung useless, so far as he could see. Damn it, he wasn't a mechanic; wasn't a mechanic any more than he was a seaman. What was he doing out here on the lake in a storm for which Parish daren't spare a man? Sam'l Stocking was right with his monkey talk about equinoxials! He braced himself between the engine block and the ribs of the starboard side, clamped the flashlight under his arm, and with swollen fingers fumbled the loose wire.

It did no good to make one wire fast. Each time he thought it tight, his own body, lurching forward, swept away at least half of his work. Twice he stopped entirely and waited for the whole launch to turn over, waited for the first jets of water that should tell him he was sinking. Sweat gummed his eyes. His hands were ghastly cold. Once, swinging his light, he saw McCarthy hunched over in a corner with one hand opening and closing on his chest.

Like the mouth of a dying fish, the hand looked. Norman returned to work.

"Tend him later," he muttered, "makes no difference. Who wants to be comfortable drowning?"

The word angered him, once spoken. Drowning! That was a silly thing to say. He stiffened his knees.

Drowning? Who could think of drowning? This boat would hold. Gustaf Erickson had built her. Somehow his mind felt respect for any boat his father had built. She was sound. Every plank and rib, every rivet-butt, sound! She had never gone down with Gustaf. He had died ashore, died wet, but on land. *There* was proof of a good boat. He jerked the trailing wire to a spark plug.

Once more he spun the flywheel. Twice, a third time. Still no life. Another hour he labored. He staggered forward at last and peered through the spray-blown glass. He could see no light, only the black face of night, shutting out winds and water and fast flying sky. He returned aft.

His foot tripped near the engine. He caught his balance and again tripped. Stooping down, he felt a square object.

The battery box! What a fool he was! No wonder she wouldn't start. The box was out of place. He never had thought of the batteries. He wedged them back where they belonged, working now in the dark, by the sense of touch in his chill bruised fingers.

His shoulders had stiffened this time when he twisted the wheel. The exertion tore at their cords. His nose was bleeding. It was dark, he could see no blood, only he tasted it as he opened his mouth, gasping for breath. The priming can rattled against the cups. Again, with a heart breaking effort he swung over the flywheel.

The engine sputtered, with a small clucking noise as if surprised at itself. He cranked the wheel again. Suddenly, so suddenly that Norman teetered on his feet, Gustaf's motor sprang back to life, began an unexcited and even vibration, purred easily. There in the cabin its voice arose in a calm, competent murmur, a positive tone, sane in the midst of a world gone mad outside, an

unbroken tempo under the explosive vociferations of the elements.

Norman struggled toward McCarthy. He shook his wet shoulders.

"I say, Doctor!"

The doctor stirred. One knee bent convulsively.

"I'm ready to go back up!" Norman shouted. "You better crawl forward there. Under the peak . . . get a bit of ballast . . . keep you from rolling."

He dragged the physician past the threatening flywheel and stowed him forward under the bow deck, bracing him down with nets and a cork belt. At the stern he lifted the trap and staggered out again into the sightless immensities of the night.

It was hideous this time. For one sickening minute, Norman considered retreat. At least he couldn't see, down there in the cabin, couldn't see the waves or feel the wind. Burst the hinges off hell, old Stocking had predicted. Or was it his father who had said that? Weakly he clung, half bent, to the wet, tipsy, cabin rail, suddenly remembering that story, hearing Gustaf's singsong voice:

"Waves so big we was glad when night come so we don't have to see them!"

The tale of the schooner *Gottland.*

A moment Norman faltered. Then he slammed down the trap. A brazen sea slapped his face. The tiller, yanking at its lines under foot, banged against his left ankle. He released the lines and gripped the oak bar between his heels. The boat gladly answered the push of its propeller. It nosed energetically through an overwhelming wave. Norman, clinging to the hand rail, felt the water as it swept over him, tearing the sou'wester from his aching head. He closed his eyes . . . funny, McCarthy and he both losing their hats. A wave stung his scalp. Funny?

When he opened his eyes, his father's craft was rising high on the top of another roller. He tried to make out the glare of Blind Man's Eye ahead, or, rearward, the somber red flash of Battle Ax. On the crest of the next wave he attempted again. Still the horizon lay black on all sides. What did that mean? What could it mean? One thing, one only. Fog!

Fog and this screaming maniac of a sea. Fog and these blasphemous winds. Fog . . . lost in fog . . .

"What's a bit of thick weather?" he asked himself groggily. "What's a bit of thick weather to an Erickson?"

It had become bitterly cold. The night was far along. How many hours had he worked on that blasted motor? Two anyway, or perhaps three. It had been past midnight, long past midnight when they left Battle Ax. He had run an hour before the engine stopped. One, two, and perhaps two more . . . it might be six o'clock. Somewhere about six. Daylight must be near. But how far had he drifted? Was the shore a mile ahead, or ten miles? Was it sand or reefs?

He pressed the tiller to port. The bow tipped impishly in a hollow between two great waves. Norman's teeth struck together while he rolled a precarious moment in a trough so deep that even the winds were shut out. He could make little headway. If he could hold even, that would be fair enough. Wait for daylight. If the gasoline lasted . . .

Eh? What was that?

He heard a sound down the squalling wind, an infinitesimal sound, far away. Wind? No, not wind. It came too steadily, a distant and indistinct snore. Battle Ax fog signal? Blind Man's Eye? No, too long a note for either of them. He heard it again. A vessel! That's what it was! A vessel . . . one long, unbroken suppliant blast.

"Distress!" Norman told himself; he squatted low against the cabin. "Vessel in distress. Continuous blast."

His tired eyes picked through the darkness. Fresh squalls of wind flung buckets of stinging spray into the air, slanting across the cabin against his face. He squinted through them, heard the wind rising, felt the whole boat, planks and ribs and keel, tremble in the face of the wrathful gale. He'd need a distress signal himself in a minute!

The storm doubled its fury. In an immense barbaric temper it flung screeching and shrieking across the distracted waters.

Norman cried aloud, his teeth chattering.

"Can't get worse . . . that's the turning point!"

The night laughed. Insolently, to prove that he knew nothing of its strength, it slapped a million new winds, booted, roweled winds down upon him. He sought the sky helplessly. A faint luminance shone above the port bow. It spread across the mists, pierced the dull opacity of the night, threw a pallid glow upon fog and water.

It was day. The horizon ran backward, halted at two hundred yards, and held fast.

The blast of the vessel in distress snorted down the wind. A long steamy cry. Much nearer. It seemed close by. Norman stretched his neck forward.

Five minutes blew past. Then a blur of dark solidity broke out of the watery walls. He could make nothing of it for a moment. Shapeless, high, a bulky immensity, it moved with a slow even motion. Then from one side an iron propeller took shape.

It was the stern of a freighter. Useless rudder and propeller tossed high in the air. Her black funnel rolled. Gradually, as she came nearer, her bow heaved into view, low in the water, with breakers smashing across the pilot

house, flooding the observation. An ore carrier, she proved to be, of old build and eight or ten hatches; sinking; sinking by the bow.

The storm pushed her toward Norman. His eyes strained. The misty forms of five men clung to the taffrail. Forward of the coal bunkers, hanging to a line, he made out others. Easing to port, he felt the protection of the vessel's side and drove ahead, around her submerged bow. He saw empty davits swinging like supplicating arms above the deckhouses. Empty. Their life-boats had been lost, then . . . smashed, no doubt.

The men were waving mechanically. But even as they waved a grayish roller depressed the bow, flung up the stern, twisted it in a sidelong gesture and smacked it down. It would have ripped to broken planks any craft venturing near just then. Norman steered off warily. Like a gull his boat rode high for a perilous moment; like a gull it dived.

What could he do? How could one man in a small fish boat even hope to help those poor devils? Besides, he had his own passenger to consider. Down there in the cabin was the doctor.

With wind-burned eyes he watched the tall carrier, glanced to leeward, looked up toward the rolling funnel, felt icy spray in his face. Nothing to do! Should he venture too near the heaving side, his own boat would be crushed. He dared not approach. Well, he might stand by. Stand by if he could . . .

The ore carrier turned, swung end for end. The bow dipped lower. The men on deck still waved. Frantic winds ripped holes in the scudding fog. The horizon marched backward. Once, while chunky clouds glowered overhead, Norman had an instant's view of miles of torn waters. The lake frothed like a sea of India ink, black as peat in the depths, with opaque rollers topped by yeasty froth.

Little smoke showed from the funnel of the water-logged vessel. Fires were dying evidently. Stokers had fled their gratings. Norman strained his eyes for the name of the wreck.

He made it out at last. *Admiral Burkett. The Admiral Burkett of Duluth.* She had been sailing under ballast, were one to judge from the way she stood out of the water. The storm had loosened plates at her bow, no doubt, and seas poured in. The bow settled and the stern lifted, buoyed up by its air compartments.

She wallowed now like a toy. Norman pitied her there in that malignant water. His own boat was getting nowhere. Southwest or east, which was he headed? Why did the fishing fleet cruise without compass? He'd have one next time out.

Next time out! He laughed foolishly. Water slapping about in the bottom of his own boat, mocked him. Next time out!

Once more the fogs parted. He squinted his eyes. He did not believe what he saw at first. Straight ahead, not three miles, loomed the dunes of the Michigan coast. Behind them, hooded in mists, he saw black pine-covered hills. And at the same time, through the murky half-lights of early morning, a great red glow burst forth upon the beach.

A Coston signal.

Life-savers . . . coast guardsmen! They had heard the *Admiral Burkett's* distress call.

Who were they? Men from Sleeping Bear station, or Parish's crew from Blind Man's Teeth? Neither, perhaps. He had circled aimlessly all night; that land might be one of the Manitou islands.

The men on the freighter waved their arms. The flare was a warning to their captain. It told him that he was near shore. It might mean rocks ahead and the loss of his vessel. It might mean safe rescue, or per-

haps wet death. With his propeller high above the water and boiler fires out, he was helpless.

Six men, clawing along a lifeline on the *Burkett's* deck, teetered through seas to the flooded chain locker under the texas. They tumbled from sight, and immediately afterward a bow anchor dropped. It slipped lower and lower into the water, dragging its chain down through the hawsehole.

The captain of the *Burkett* had let go the anchor to keep from dragging ashore. The iron found bottom. Would she hold? She might be fouled in her own chain, useless as the rudder hanging in the air.

Norman brought his boat into the wind for the third time. Again he remembered the doctor. It had been hours since he had heard a sound from him. He was wanted for an emergency case, eh? Some other doctor would have to answer it this time. It had been hours, McCarthy might be dead. . . .

Norman peered back at the wreck. Dragging, that anchor chain looked. It was not holding the freighter. And the shore had fogged again. Seas licked higher, each with a lacy top. Under the sides of his boat Norman discovered that the water turned from black to olive green, to yellow. He was in shallow depth, all right. That was sand below him, stirred up by the breakers, hurled lakeward in an undertow.

He squinted again at the shore. Fatigue made his eyes tricky. But indistinctly the shape of hills loomed out of the mist. Nearer by, a froth of white water patched the surface of the lake. A reef. He knew what that meant! He swung over his tiller. Glancing back, he saw that the men aboard the freighter were watching him pull away. He felt a strangling pity for them. He lifted one hand, in a gesture that might have signified anything to them.

The strip of white water chased along his starboard

side. It broke off suddenly. Blue water lay beyond it. The end of the reef, perhaps. Norman caught his breath and steered back toward the *Burkett*. No good going in that direction.

His own plight had become a thing apart from him. His own life and Gustaf's boat were insignificant. Scared? Sure, he was scared! Who wouldn't be? He remembered what Delong had said. Those men on the freighter, were they scared, too? Of course they were!

The ore carrier snapped at her anchor. Fighting against it, she backed shoreward. A hundred yards astern washed the white water of the reef.

Fifty yards.

She kept on dragging.

There was no hope she would not hit. Forgetting himself, forgetting Doctor McCarthy, forgetting his father's boat, forgetting Julie Richaud and Sue Stocking, the son of Gustaf Erickson watched the propeller of the unfortunate *Admiral Burkett* mount above the breakers, saw her rudder flap senselessly, saw the bow hitch backward, again . . . again.

Now she held. She thumped down on the rocky ledge and stood firm a moment. Then a lumpy roller lifted her and thrashed her mercilessly.

The men on the deck threw up their hands. Norman fancied that he heard them cry out all together. They slid, slipped, scrambled. The freighter poised for one brave moment. Then, with a slow weary gesture, she rolled upon her port side. A wave smacked over her, and the funnel, still carrying a wisp of smoke, tumbled end-for-end, and pitched into the froth of waters.

Norman kicked over the tiller. He'd better watch his own going if he wanted ever to see home again. Home? He tasted the word bitterly. Where was it? What was it? To whom was he going home? To old Gustaf? No. A chilly grief spread through his heart.

He choked it away. There was no time for regrets. Again he dodged the reef. No chance of crossing it. Must go around it. There might be quieter water beyond. As he slid into a trough, mounted the next wave, and glanced shoreward, he cried out and gripped tight against the cabin.

Blind Man's Eye! Stiff, unyielding, unmindful of wind and water, it poked up its head half a mile to the southwest along the coast. At the same instant a steamy grumble pressed outward against the wind. Two short, one long, two short. . . .

The storm had muffled the fog signal until now, had flung its great bellow inland, south and east to the secure hills, had muted its brassy tongue seaward where it was needed, where masters drove their ships on reefs because they could hear no warning.

Two short, one long, two short. . . .

Norman's feet steadied on the tiller. The husky voice of Blind Man's Eye called uproariously to him. The tall unlighted shaft stood serenely upon the beach. All night it had watched faithfully for him. Its white beam had stretched into the heavy insoluble darkness, searching him out, making a straight familiar path for his erring boat.

Blind Man's Eye welcomed him home!

Between the wash and the tower, like grasshoppers on the sand, a coast guard crew made ready their gun. So it was one of Parish's men who burned the Coston! They would send a shot line across the wreck of the *Admiral Burkett*, haul out the hawser carrying the breeches buoy and take in her men.

Relief, like a soft warm breeze, floated through Norman's spirit. Relief! They were safe, those sailors. Now he need only get his own boat ashore. He need only run her up the sand, drag the doctor out, determine whether he was dead or just seasick. . . .

A chill wave slapped down upon him. Shoot a line? Shoot a line out to Blind Man's Teeth? They couldn't do that. He turned cold, sick. Captain Parish had said so himself.

"With a blow off the north, the gun can't make it. The Teeth are too far out."

Well, they were trying it, anyhow.

On shore the brass gun exploded. Its projectile broke through the mist. The shot line uncoiled, spun into the air after it. Like the ball of a cannon the shot ripped the fog . . . eighteen pounds beating against the wind . . . yielding before it. The line slacked. It dropped snarling into the water.

Too short. A second and a third time the gun exploded. A second and a third time the line sagged into the water. Short. Too much wind. Too much weather.

Minutes, half hours, were passing. The ore carrier was grinding her iron side plates now, chewing them off on the Teeth. Ashore the surfmen stood idly. Norman guessed that they were debating among themselves, debating whether they dared launch their boat. He thought with a quickening heart of the only other time that Parish's boat had put out since he came to the point. That storm had been nothing compared to this one. He thought of James Delong clinging to his broken yacht, of James Delong's dog lying dead on the beach, of his own fright. The coast guardsmen had wasted no time splashing out to duty that other night. He had made a poor figure remaining ashore. And to-night, at home in a drawer full of shirts, lay Cat-eye McGoogan's letter.

A madness seized him. Afraid? Scart? Coward? He'd never really tested himself. That river was no test for an Erickson. Besides, there had been that damnable sheep! If Parish's crew wouldn't attempt this, why shouldn't he do it for them? Why not?

He steered to landward of the reef. Water spurted high into the twisting air, drenching down upon him. The mist split into ribbons like a rotten sail in a blow. The *Admiral Burkett* loomed taller as she tipped on her side, with her short spars pointing shoreward. The men . . . how small they looked, no bigger now than sandpipers. . . .

He could try it! But he must hurry. Hours the vessel had wallowed.

A smell of gasoline burst up from the cabin. Doctor McCarthy pushed open the trap.

"Get in there!" Norman howled. "In or out! Don't let water down there! Close that trap!"

The doctor staggered out. A wide clot of blood scarred his forehead where he had hit the engine block. He did not speak. Clinging desperately to the cabin, he stared unbelievingly at the foggy coast, at the half submerged wreck, at Norman. Slowly he perceived the plan. He smiled sickishly.

"Maybe I can help," he shouted.

Norman nodded.

He pointed Gustaf's boat toward the steamer. Already he felt the urge of the running undertow. Breakers, white headed, white bearded, like giants incredibly old and unbelievably powerful, pommeled the side. But the motor chugged unexcitedly. Norman's feet worked nimbly along the tiller. He glanced shoreward once. The surfmen stood close together in a tight group.

They saw him, undoubtedly. They were staying ashore while he tried. No power-boat could make it out through that surf against the wind. It was up to him. Lives . . . the lives of those men there on the freighter, those sandpipers, with little hands, hanging to little ropes . . . they all depended on him. Parish had failed. Would he fail too?

He worked his bow closer under the lee of the wreck. Breakers trespassed like incautious, swaggering boys over the decks of the steamer. Spray, whipping across her high-flung rail, slapped back into Norman's face and welted his hard skin.

Twenty yards away the deck tipped now. A sailor with a coil of rope on his arm crawled down to the rail. A tall wave buried him just as he lifted on one knee to fling the rope. The wave wrenched over him, and he stood up to try it again.

Norman screamed into McCarthy's ear.

"Get the line when he throws it . . . I can't go too close. . . ."

The sailor flung down the rope. It snapped directly over Norman's head, uncoiled in the wind, whipped down. Without waiting for McCarthy he caught it loosely under his arm. The engine pushed his boat ahead five feet, ten; the wind, swooping around the end of the wreck, drove it back twenty. They were paying out the line up there on deck.

"Grab the tiller . . . that way . . . with your feet. . . ."

McCarthy obeyed. Norman took a full breath and with the line still under his arm, set one foot on the wet coaming alongside the cabin. Cautiously, gripping the hand rail, doused deep under mountainous waves, he crawled to the bow of his boat.

He made the line fast to the post.

"Come on!" he howled, and the wind ate up his voice.

Fresh blasts ripped out of the north. The fish boat drew away from the freighter until the thin line snapped tight. Norman felt that the whole world was being shaken under his tortured boat, the whole universe pommeled, beaten, shattered for the fancy of evil tempered winds. A moment the fog piled thicker, a

dull, unlighted wrap of chill dampness, opaque as mud, that cut off sight of steamer and shore, that drew a dark cowl about the boat, that admitted only the noise, the interminable and intolerable noise like a drunken regiment of drummers, the noise of wind and sky and sea.

He glanced overside. A dark shape was rolling toward him on the crest of a gray wave. A man? No, a dog. The ship's dog! He reached out his arm. One moment he drew back his hand. Again he leaned out, strained toward the animal. It was a big dog, a good swimmer. His fingers gripped the hair, then a strong metal collar.

"Jump," he cried, "jump!"

A wave leaped high over the coaming and flung the wet dog groveling at his feet. He looked up quickly at the deck above.

"Come on, men, hurry!" he howled again.

A pair of boots protruded over the higher rail. They slid, jerking along the life line from the steamer deck. A bulky body followed. Norman dragged the fellow to his knees, opened the forward hatch and flung in the seaman. He threw the dog in, too, before he slapped shut the cover. A second pair of boots kicked out of the fog. Again the hatch opened and shut with a bang. This time water poured into the cabin. Norman thought of the wiring, of the stout-hearted engine doing its best. Without the engine, if the wiring became wet, that thin little line would part in a second. Without the engine there was no hope.

A third man glided the rope, hand over hand; a fourth; a fifth. The mist slit open and Norman peered up through wet lashes, with aching, tormented eyes. Five more heads bobbed into sight. Farther aft, another, paying him no attention, stood immovably by the rail, watching this hazardous rescue, taking no part in it.

Six more to make the trip. That last one . . . that was the captain, it flashed over Norman, a captain loath to leave his command. What difference to the captain if she were only a tramp vessel, what difference if her very heart were torn out already! His own, his own command! Norman remembered his father, who swam alone from the wreck of his schooner on Mustache Shoal. It would be hard to bring the captain down. A sixth man slid, a seventh.

The eighth, the ninth . . .

"Where are the rest!" Norman screamed.

"Four washed overboard in the dark trying to launch the life-boats," the tenth sailor answered. His great voice was hoarse and blustery. "The old man's there yet . . . don't think he'll come." He jabbed a glove toward the broken ore carrier.

The captain had raised one foot toward the rail. Norman saw his face for a troubled second. Old, he appeared, with red whiskers. A sea broke across the deck. Before it came, the officer had drawn back his foot. Deliberately, coolly as a man at his own fireside, he braced his body while he fumbled in his pocket, opened a clasp knife and slashed the rope. He watched the fish boat ride safely away. He waved once and disappeared behind the rail.

He was not seen again. Such was his code.

CHAPTER XXIV

HOME

Norman slapped shut the cabin trap. Only one of the *Burkett* sailors remained on deck. He was a heavy man, brown as an old saddle, hard, with a face ugly as sin and no teeth. Two hundred pounds he must have weighed; he was heavy to have slid the line. He said not a word, only held on grimly, his head twisted about, watching the deserted steamer wistfully as it faded behind the fog.

Ashore men were running. Norman drove the bow deliberately and desperately against the high spitting wash of the beach. He was risking his father's boat. But why not?

Whose boat was she now, Gustaf's or his? Often Gustaf had risked his boat. When had he spared her if men were in peril? Gustaf was always reckless. Foolhardy, Jim Nelson called him; called him foolhardy and loved him for it. It was foolhardiness that took him out alone to save the mail carrier two summers ago, the time he nearly smashed his back. Risky? Gustaf loved risk!

She was a great little boat, wasn't she? Well built. Brave. Dependable. Handle her properly, what wouldn't she do? What hadn't she done for Gustaf? For Gustaf? Ah, but she was his son's boat now. She would do as much for him. Ten sailors . . . ten sailors and Doctor McCarthy depended on him. He drove the boat cruelly.

A boat could be mended.

The wind moaned in a tremendous and overwhelming sorrow. Cheated combers trooped shoreward, threw up wet arms, collapsed with explosive bellows, perished undismayed against the beach, and in subtler reincarnation rushed back to the lake again with a tricky undertow. Gustaf's boat eluded them.

Forty yards from the beach Norman made out the forms of men chasing like spiders. They were running with a line into the surf. Some, staying ashore as anchors, were holding its end. A half-dozen others were beating against the wind down the shelving beach, bringing the rope into the water to meet him. He wiped spray from his eyes. So they thought he couldn't make it, eh? Thought his boat would smash to pieces in the shallow water? Thought McCarthy and those ten men, wading in, would be swept back by the undertow? Well, they probably would.

The fog was breaking rapidly. A pale and melancholy illumination spread across the flouncing lake. Directly overhead a dim wet disk strove ineffectually to pierce the clouds. The sun. Straight above. It couldn't be noon? It must be, if that was the sun. Hours and hours he had struggled.

He screwed together his eyes that were blue as his father's had been. He watched Captain Parish straining in the lead with the end of the rope about his shoulders, pushing out toward the endangered fish boat, up to his knees, up to his hips, up to his armpits in water, saw his bony cheeks chopping the mist like an ax.

He watched Captain Stocking, second on the line, his fat red face twisted into astounding contours, his mouth like a cavern.

He watched Anderson and Shay and other surfmen whom he knew; behind them, Baker, edging nervously into the undertow, drawing back, pulling feebly at the rope, dropping it.

He watched James Delong, bareheaded, in white pants, hauling with the surfmen.

He watched Sue Stocking thrash into the waves with the men, and Julie Richaud, up to her knees in water, fists to her cheeks, immovable as the light tower itself, staring straight at him in an ecstasy of terror.

So Julie had come? Come to pay a Sunday visit in spite of what Captain Stocking had said? He would convince her this time. *Make* her stay.

The fishing boat flung atop the last of the breakers. It lifted its bow high into the scudding air in a final tipsy plunge. It scraped against bottom with an impact that threatened to tear Norman's head from his shoulders and his heart from his chest.

Traps to the cabin slapped off. The sailors from the *Admiral Burkett* tumbled up to the deck in agonized attitudes of horror, hurt and dismay. The dog leaped out first among them. He plunged overboard and started swimming to shore just as Parish staggered through the side of a tipsy wave. The captain flung the line from his shoulders. It landed with a thud on the deck. A sailor grabbed it and made it fast to a cleat.

"Wade in!" Norman shouted to McCarthy.

The big old man from the *Burkett* already had started, hand over hand, his legs kicking bottom. McCarthy went next. Norman, watching him go, felt the boat tip under foot. An unsuspected roller struck him from behind and wrenching loose his grip, swept him overboard. He spun shoreward through gravel and sand. The sucking undertow pinched greedy fingers about his waist. The wet line streaked above him. He grasped it, tugged, swallowed sand and water, heard an enormous roaring as of innumerable field pieces, breathed air once more, and was dragged to land.

It was Julie who was talking in his ear, saying sweet,

silly things. It was Julie who was running along beside him, her stout little arm patting his left side. Why was he so tired? Why was Julie here? He opened his eyes. Why was James Delong toting him on his back?

They reached the lighthouse.

"I'll call you, Julie," Delong said. "Just a minute . . . want to rub him down."

"Here's a sailor . . . he has a broken arm," that was Sue's voice. "And, father, Norman brought in ten men!"

"And a dog," Captain Stocking added.

"A dog?" Sue cried.

Norman relaxed. A dog? What of it?

"Whose dog?" Sue demanded.

"Ship's dog," Samuel Stocking answered.

Norman shook his head.

"No," he contradicted. "That ship's broken up. It's my dog now."

Delong's fingers felt like iron, pinching the flesh on his back.

"That's enough," the lawyer cried, "have you in bed in a minute. Here, take some of this . . . warm you up."

It burned his throat, whatever it was. Languidly he closed his eyes. Outside the wind hooted. Norman heard it peacefully. Wind? It rocked a fellow to sleep, that wind. And he used to fear it? No, he couldn't have feared wind. He loved it, just as his father did. He heard the panes in the windows rattle, heard footsteps pass hurriedly in the corridor, felt cold drafts as doors opened.

"I'm coming in!"

Julie's voice. Her eager, warm little voice! Norman sat up feebly. He remembered at last. To-day was Sunday, the equinoxial. The keeper had not wanted visitors.

"Julie," he whispered, "Julie, come here a minute."

She came with a rush. But why was she crying? What was there to cry about? Or was that just Julie's way? Cry . . . why, she would cry or laugh, one of the two, every ten minutes, or else she'd die. That was all right. Wasn't he half Frenchie himself? He patted her hand.

"Give me my best suit," he bade in a husky whisper, "in that closet there. My uniform. That's it. Thanks. And Julie, when I come out I want to tell you something."

How the wind blew! He crawled from the bed uncertainly and under his feet felt his engine still racing. He heard the keeper pad down the hall. He crept to the door and called.

"Hi, Captain Stocking . . . the skipper's on that wreck yet!"

"Aye, there's a real captain, go down with his ship. Ain't no wimmen folks to home, that means. Parish knows he's there. Barge's bustin' up proper, but wind's droppin' . . . mebbe he'll get him off . . ." the keeper's voice trailed through a bedroom door.

Norman fumbled into his clothes. He felt better, up! No time to be in bed, on Sunday, with Julie Richaud visiting the light. He walked unsteadily into the kitchen. Doctor McCarthy sat by the stove, his fat face blue-white and the clot of blood still coloring his forehead.

"I can't thank you all at once, Erickson."

Norman grinned.

"That's nothing. Who's groaning, Doc?"

"The cook off the ore barge. He has a broken arm."

"Here's coffee, Norman," Julie said.

"Thanks," he answered.

Tears again wet her eyes.

"No call for crying," he said awkwardly.

"Not cry for gladness?"

"Let her cry!" boomed McCarthy.

Norman squeezed her hand and with exploring feet sought the kitchen door. He must get outside for a minute, must feel the wind again, let it clear his head. Most of all, he must see the radiant white tower of Blind Man's Eye.

Down in the squat little brick house the fog signal bellowed, two short, one long, two short. The wind still squalled, pulsing overhead. Swift-legged clouds streaked the gray heavens. Shreds of fog trembled by in the lower air, with long clear spaces between them. Out on the Teeth a ghostly shower of breakers hid the unfortunate freighter.

Norman walked slowly around the house, breathing deeply. Midway to the tower Samuel Stocking, his daughter and James Delong were tramping toward him. The men lifted their feet heavily, like pack horses. Sue walked between them with her chin high. She wore her father's black sou'wester. Her face was happy. Queer, that she should look so happy. Queer? Why, no! Wasn't he happy himself? He was returned to land. But not as a fugitive. He had not fled the sea. Land and gray sea, he loved both of them. He feared neither. It was a dream that he ever had feared, a dream melting with the soft insipid fog. Land and gray sea, both were beneficent to him.

The floor was wet, the carpet soggy in the parlor. Captain Stocking sank into his rocking chair and stretched out his short legs. Julie opened the door from the kitchen. She came in composedly. The chair which Delong pushed toward her was much too large, so that when she sat down her feet did not touch the floor.

"Good riddance!" the captain said, gulping.

He blew his raspberry nose ferociously.

"Good riddance, by Skillagallee!"

"Riddance?" Norman asked.

"Your friend Baker," Delong answered.

Sue broke in gravely.

"He refused to rescue you."

"He backed out!" Captain Stocking shouted. "Parish got his eyes opened. Ran him across the dunes soon as you was all ashore. Goin' to drown him ten fathom deep. Such language, and at his age. My, oh, my!"

Norman listened with inattention. He heard what the keeper said, but his gaze flitted to Julie's round flushed face. Her black eyes were nearer purple now. He regarded them with a growing sense of peace. He was not interested in Ed Baker any more. Strange, but he was not. Many other things seemed much more important to him.

"My boat?" he asked.

"High and dry, lad, high and dry. Skinned up a little. We drug it in, all heavin' together." The keeper rocked hard, twice opened his mouth as if to speak and twice closed it. He returned to Norman. "Mebbe you will listen to them gulls next time, Erickson. I warned ye! Warned Delong here. Told you a man with sense would watch September twenty-third, didn't I? Well, you'll learn, all of ye. You'll learn, Erickson, be a good light-keeper yet. . . ."

Norman swallowed. An old worry came back to disturb his present ease.

"I've a summons," he confessed, "somebody complained to Inspector McGoogan. . . ."

"Cat-eye McGoogan?" Captain Stocking snapped his fingers. "That snoopin' alligator! I've writ him!"

"About me?" asked Norman.

Sue Stocking broke in quickly. "Did you have a letter from headquarters, Norman, and not tell us?"

Norman nodded.

Captain Stocking gulped.

"Ye did? Well, I had one too, Erickson. And I answered it. Ruint two pen points afore it was done. 'Conduct unbecomin' the service!' Josiah Parish will write McGoogin now I guess, and Doc McCarthy. Don't you need to worry none!" He mopped his face. "You young 'uns have took all the tucker out of me this day for sure. First Erickson gets nigh drownded, and now Sue! It's too many things at once!" He looked accusingly at his daughter. "Why couldn't you of waited?"

"Waited for what?" Norman demanded.

Sue Stocking smiled. Delong arose and walked toward her.

"You see, Norman old shipmate," she explained, "I've decided, Jimmy and I have, to go back inland to live. When? Why, Jimmy, just when do we go back?"

James Delong gripped her hand affectionately

"To-morrow or the next day at latest. As soon as we all get dried out and can bring the missioner down. We're going to be married here, Erickson, in the lighthouse by a missioner!"

"Well?" Sue asked in the silence that followed. "Aren't you congratulating us?"

Norman glanced at Julie Richaud. Her black eyes were large and full of light, her cheeks flaming under her wet hair. She sat very composedly in the lighthouse parlor, as if she had lived there always. Sue arose briskly.

"Come, Jimmy, these people need something to eat. I don't know what they'll do after I'm gone. Norman isn't much of a housekeeper. He had ashes in his bedroom once! How will you manage, you and dad? How will you ever keep shipshape?"

"Never mind, Sue," Norman said, "I guess Julie can tend to that."

"Julie?" Captain Stocking swung around.

"Yes," she agreed, looking straight at Norman. A great contentment shone on his face. Her own glowed and responded to it. "Yes," she agreed, "I'll keep it shipshape."

"My, oh, my!" the keeper puffed out of the room.

Norman lifted Julie blindly from the chair. She allowed her hands to remain in his. They were trembling a little.

"Julie?"

"Yes, Norman."

"You'll be happy at the lighthouse?"

"Didn't you hear me tell them? What matter the light, Norman, or the farm, or water, or anything, so long as we are together? It's yours and mine, isn't it? Land and sea, both of them. Yours and mine. Blind Man's Eye will be our home."

The door burst open. Samuel Stocking halted halfway through it, stared, exclaimed, popped out again. He blundered into the kitchen, saw the couple there, and escaped a second time.

"My, oh, my!" he met Doctor McCarthy in the hall. "Such a day! Such a day! And they ain't a spot on the reservation a fool old man can go without settin' foot where he ain't required."

The doctor glanced at the two closed doors.

"A fine girl, Sue," he remarked.

"Aye, and a fine boy I got. And my other girl, Julie, she's fine too, was you to ask me. Let's go smoke, Doctor. They's a bench in the signal house. My, oh, my!"

He stamped down the hall. The fog signal hooted . . . two short, one long . . . it died out, needing steam. Norman heard it undisturbed. Never mind, the keeper would tend it this time. He touched Julie's fragrant black hair.

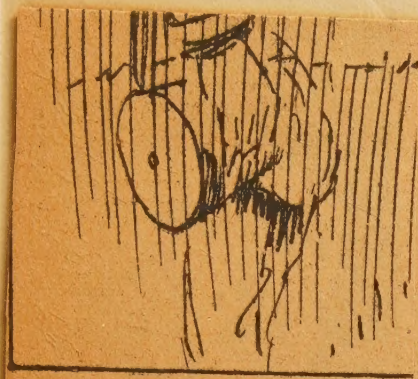
"I love the water, Julie," he whispered.

"Nothing else, Norman?"

" . . . the water and you.

Leaning down, he wiped her eyes gently. After all, she was only a little girl.

THE END



Poli

WELL, all I know is just what I read in the papers, and what I see as I prowl hither and thither. The wife and I had a fine visit in Havana, Cuba. It's the first time I had ever been there, although she had stopped there with our retinue of children one time when they come around through the canal. It sure is pretty place, one of the leanest Cities I ever saw. ey have got some new ief of police or somebody they are a Nut on clean- up and believe me they the old town scrubbed shining.

ll write you more about the merican Conference later, as ave only been there long

men from neighboring fraternity houses joined in an attempt to rescue as much of the furniture as possible and succeeded in removing the piano and most of the downstairs furnishings, but the girls lost practically all their personal effects including eight fur coats and jewelry of an unestimated value.

After the preliminary rush to any haven the girls gathered at the Lamba Chi Alpha fraternity where they were served a hot lunch and furnished with army clothes belonging to the fraternity men. Donning these, the girls made their way to another sorority house for the rest of the night.

Miss Augusta Christianson, who was the only member of the sorority up at the time the fire was noticed, smelled the smoke and work the other girls.

"We did not bother to put much on or pick up anything, as we thought it was a little blaze and the fire department would be along in a minute to put it out," Miss Christianson said. "Then suddenly the whole house seemed to break into flames and we rushed frantically after the little we could get."

Two girls, whose room was farthest away from the flames, reported this morning that they had saved almost all their clothing, but the others were not so fortunate.

Efforts were being made today by the secretary of the college to obtain a new house for the girls for the remainder of the year.

Some few of the fire victims were reported to be digging in the ashes in hopes of finding something of value but the most of them were busy making arrangements for new clothes.

Loss on the house was estimated at 18,500. The sorority had just added to their home and the new

(Continued on Page Two)

DETZER NOVEL GETS SOME COMMENTS IN THE RAPIDS HERALD

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